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INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS, THEIR ADVISING
RELATIONSHIPS AND ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY

by

Katherine M. Najjar

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies

(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

October 2015

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STUDY

Katherine M. Najjar, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Marilyn L. Grady

Thirty four international doctoral students were interviewed to determine what types of advising and mentoring experiences were effective and beneficial, and what experiences had been difficult or unhelpful. The students reported a high level of satisfaction with their advisors and with their program of studies. However, during the interviews, students began to describe other factors that contributed to their well-being and their experiences.

Issues described included language difficulties and problems developing relationships with other students. Although most students developed close, personal relationships with advisors or departmental colleagues, few students reported having large numbers of friends and associates outside of their academic departments.

Topics that international doctoral students described as significant in their lives included specific obstacles encountered with immigration or visas, family and financial concerns. Several lived in poverty, and the precarious nature of their personal incomes and academic financing was frustrating and stressful. The students also spoke of the ways in which they had grown as scholars and as individuals. These experiences influenced

how the students visualized their future positions as educators, global citizens, and community members. They were open to new ideas and experiences. The students frequently used language that was associated with high levels of self-efficacy and personal growth; in many ways they mentored themselves. Potential policy changes and additional areas of research are identified.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the international doctoral students who so generously entrusted me with their stories and experiences. I have no appropriate words to express my gratitude. I remain honored by their confidences, and I am in awe of their intelligence, curiosity, and creativity. My world is better for having met each of them.

My work is also dedicated to my wonderful family. My parents, Richard and Deanna Schlenz, raised me to think for myself, to ask questions, and to look for answers. I especially thank my husband, Lotfollah Najjar, who is my favorite international scholar. He has been a thoughtful guide, a true mentor, and my best friend. He has given me the world, and seeing that world with him has been a joy.

Finally, our daughter, Jihan Najjar worked as my transcriber and as my sounding board. I could not have completed this project without her compassionate insights, thoughtful remarks, and diligent efforts. Her assistance as a fellow scholar and researcher made this project better in every way.

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My committee has been terrific. First, always, I thank Dr. Marilyn Grady, my advisor. I have joked that I was “shoved” rather than “led” through the program. I stand by my choice of verbs, with many thanks. I expect she will always be the voice in my head.

My committee was comprised of remarkable people: Dr. Barbara LaCost, whose classes, friendship, and conversations I have valued beyond measure, Dr. Kent Mann, a calm and steady presence in the turmoil of doctoral studies, and Dr. Dixie Sanger, who is one of the kindest people I have ever met. I have also learned more than I can express from Dr. Jody Isernhagen, an incredibly patient woman who has taught me about teaching and critical reading, Dr. John Mackiel, whose passion for justice is contagious, and Dr. Richard Torroco, whose leadership on issues of poverty changed my world.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Context of the Problem

United States colleges and universities hosted 886,052 international students in the 2013-2014 academic year. More than 329, 000 were graduate students (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2014). Most institutions of higher education in the U.S. have extensive programming which has been developed for undergraduates. Such programming offered has been an attempt to fulfill needs for student development, language learning, and cultural and subcultural affiliation. However, programming that specifically addresses the needs of graduate students is less common.

Although international graduate students' basic needs are similar to those of undergraduates, their lives are often more complex. Many have families. They may have left careers and other responsibilities in their own countries. They also are engaged in more demanding and intensive programs of study, especially at the doctoral level. For many international doctoral students, the most important relationship they are able to develop outside of their own national group will be the relationship they create with their faculty advisor. The faculty advisor not only guides academic studies, supervises research or teaching, has the power to provide or deny funding, but may also serve as a professional gatekeeper who advises on publications and conferences. The advisor may also act as a mentor or a vital connection to future employment.

Statement of the Problem

Although institutions of higher education are increasingly reliant on graduate students, including international doctoral students to conduct research and to conduct teaching responsibilities, little research has been completed regarding their relationships with their faculty advisors. The relationships which doctoral students have with their advisors are, for many, the primary and most professionally significant relationship many students will establish in their studies.

The population of international graduate students in 2014 is keeping pace with general graduate studies growth (IIE, 2014); however, unless populations of American-born students continue to increase, basic economics will lead institutions of higher education to sustain enrollment figures with ever-increasing numbers of international students. These students have clear needs and expectations as individuals and as a population. Finding ways to deliver a quality education experience will help to sustain higher education in America in the future.

In 2013, the United States claimed approximately 40 % of international doctoral students (OECD, 2013). Nearly half of all Ph.Ds. in science and engineering earned in American universities in 2006 were awarded to foreign-born students (Adnett, 2010; Bashir, 2007; Chelleraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2008; Finn, 2012; Hazen & Alberts, 2007). Nearly two-thirds of international Ph.D. graduates remain in the United States at least ten years after their degrees are completed, teaching, and doing research (Adnett, 2010; Chelleraj et al., 2008; Finn, 2012; Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

In order to retain competitive advantage, and more importantly, to continue to serve students, U.S. higher education faculty members will need to discover how to

best guide international graduate students through their doctoral programs and into careers. This study will begin to address this deficiency of information. In local terms, 2201 students, or 9% of the students at the Midwestern research institution, are classified as international. Of this population, 1055 are graduate students, and 533 of that number are doctoral students. Although slightly fewer than half of all international students attending the institution are graduate students, 23% of all graduate students at the institution are international students (Office of Institutional Research, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how individual international doctoral students described their relationships with their advisors, and to understand what practices and techniques they perceived faculty members at a Midwestern research institution employed to advance students' progress in their doctoral programs. The following question guided the study:

- How did advisors of international doctoral students promote personal development and innovation in students?
- What were best practices in advisement of international doctoral students?

The sub questions included:

- What types of experiences influenced the intercultural competence, attitudes, and adaptations of international students?
- What were common experiences of support within the student's relationship with their advisor?

- What were common experiences of disconnect or discouragement within the advisor/advisee relationship?

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, an *international doctoral student* is a member of the population of graduate students who have entered, and who remain in the U.S. with student visas which permit them to study in the United States. They are students who have completed their undergraduate education, and who are pursuing their terminal degrees. This population does not include those who are foreign-born, yet who have the right to live and work in the United States through naturalization or permanent residency status.

An *advisor* is the faculty member who “has the greatest responsibility for helping guide the advisee through the graduate program” (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001, p. 158). An advisor, then, directly oversees the student’s research. Tasks or roles of a successful advisor are:

- to provide reliable information
- to socialize the student in departmental and occupational norms
- to advocate for the student, and
- to model appropriate professional behavior.

Advisors coach, challenge, provide exposure, and guide students towards opportunities. Advising is hierarchical (Jaeger, Sandmann, & Kim, 2011; Rose, 2005; Schlosser, Lyons, Talleyrand, Kim, & Johnson, 2011a).

A *mentor* is a member of the higher educational institution’s faculty or staff who intentionally guides a student’s career or life path. Mentoring relationships may

include the same tasks as advising relationships, but mentors are distinguished by “a mutual emotional investment that develops naturally and spontaneously and cannot be legislated” (Rose, p. 56, 2005). Schlosser et al. (2011a) also ascribed benevolence and beneficence to a mentoring relationship. Although graduate students nearly always have advisors, fewer report having mentors (Schlosser et al., 2011a; Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007). Nevertheless, many advisors are also mentors (Sedlacek et al., 2007). Mentoring has been described as a unique and distinctive relationship which incorporates a wide range of roles, yet the whole is ultimately more than the sum of its parts (Johnson, 2002). “Advisee mentoring has been found to be a positive predictor of research productivity and self-efficacy among doctoral students” (Jaeger et al., 2011, p. 7). Jaeger et al. described mentoring as complementary, reciprocal, and personal.

On the other hand, some researchers have seen no difference between advising and mentoring, particularly in academia. “In essence, graduate advisors help their advisees learn about the academic field, the university setting, research, ethics, and many other important aspects related to being an academic professional” (Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004, p. 225). Schlosser and Gelso (2001) envisioned the advising relationship as a “working alliance” in which both sides contribute, but in which there is a continuum of self-efficacy which the student is able to develop through a supportive relationship.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The first phase of the study was a quantitative survey, the purpose of which was to collect general data which revealed opinions and needs of international

graduate students of their advisors in the completion of their academic careers. Demographic data was also collected, so that experiences of satisfaction were correlated by students' ages, nationalities, and areas of academic specialization.

The second phase was comprised of qualitative interviews of student volunteers. The volunteers were contacted through the quantitative survey process, and were self-selected because they were willing to describe their experiences. Phenomena explored included perceptions of the advising relationship, and the ways in which that relationship served, or did not serve the student (Seidman, 2013).

Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into nine chapters and an appendix section. This chapter briefly introduced the nature of the graduate student-advisor relationship, the rationales for the study and for using qualitative research, the statement of the problem, and the research questions. The second chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature. Chapter Three describes the research methods including how data was collected and analyzed, how interviews were conducted, validation techniques to increase the validity and transferability of the research, potential ethical issues, and the researcher background. The fourth chapter will describes the experiences that the students in the study framed as positive, academically and personally. The fifth chapter describes experiences which international doctoral students interviewed presented as negative. Chapter Six contains descriptions and interpretations of individual students who discuss language and cultural barriers which they have encountered in developing as researchers and in developing relationships. Chapter Seven contains student responses and insights regarding their

experiences as international doctoral students, their experiences of power and their lack of power. Chapter Eight contains student accounts of growth and development, as well as what they are taking from their experiences. Finally, the ninth chapter includes analysis. I discuss implications for university policy and development of best practices, potential for future research, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the conclusion, and a description of lessons learned.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Research on international higher education has been directed towards examining the needs and experiences of undergraduate international students. Despite the complex nature of the international student population in the U.S., a group of individuals from nearly 200 countries, who understand hundreds of languages with dozens of faith traditions, this diverse population tends to be researched as a monolithic entity. Language, culture shock, and the influence of personal concerns has driven most research of international student experiences. Few studies have involved only international graduate students, although the basic needs of international graduate students are similar to those of the undergraduate population (Le & Gardner, 2010). Graduate students in general are not a widely studied population. Research focusing on international graduate students has often been bounded by their roles as teaching assistants, their classroom and research performance, or how they are regarded by faculty members.

Research on the advising or mentoring relationship in higher education is limited. The terms advising and mentoring are used interchangeably. Such research involves all graduate students, regardless of nationality. Because international graduate students have additional language, cultural, and institutional barriers to overcome, existing research is insufficient to address their needs.

International Students

The needs and concerns of international students may be classified into the categories of language, culture shock and adaptation, and personal factors which may

be specific to an individual student, such as loneliness. A body of research is emerging that questions what the institutional role should be vis-à-vis international students, and how much adapting higher educational institutions should expect of this population. Finally, international student identity has been identified as an area of research.

Language

Language proficiency has been identified as the critical concern of international students. Higher education providers require a nuanced understanding of the language difficulties experienced by international students. Academic writing involves high-level cognitive functions such as planning, synthesizing, organizing, and composing. Unlike reading, which is passive, writing requires complex meaning production through language use (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Brown, 2008; Hawthorne, Minas, & Singh, 2004; Li, Chen, Duanmu, 2010; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Timko, Linhardt, & Stewart, 1991; Trice, 2003; Zhang & Mi, 2010). For students who aim for careers in which published research is expected, language writing skills are vital, and such skills may be even more important to student success than speaking ability (Zhang & Mi, 2009).

The first step for many international students is to develop sufficient competency in the language of the host country in order to succeed academically. Additional concerns expressed in the literature have included learning to avoid instances of plagiarism, the challenges of academic writing, and imperatives to publish. Publishing and writing abilities have been learning issues among

international students, even if the students are familiar with the conventions of academic writing in their home countries.

International students often have limited experience in the type of writing which is privileged in English-speaking universities, and which is standard in the world of academic publishing. Research has shown that instances of plagiarism tend to decline to statistical insignificance by the second of year of graduate school, as students gain experience and understand expectations, but difficulties in writing may persist for years (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Gilmore, Strickland, Timmerman, Maher, & Feldon, 2010; Huang, 2010; Trice, 2003).

Culture Shock and Adjustment

The longer students live in the host country, the better adapted to the culture they become. As they discover ways in which to navigate the educational system and to improve their language skills, they become comfortable with cultural norms which may be different from their own. International students are students first, and they face many of the same issues that affect their host peers (Abe et al., 1998; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

However, the absence of family and the limited number of close personal ties in the host country also make international students highly susceptible to stress-related challenges. Coming to terms with sexual identity, homesickness, finances, academics, and developing as an adult are all areas of concern. Facing these concerns is simply more difficult because of international students' relative isolation from family and peers (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007).

Personal factors that are specific to each student

Family obligations. International students often report stressors that are related to academics, financial matters, and high family expectations. The majority of international undergraduate students are sponsored fully or partially by their families, which often results in a great fear of failure and uncertainty (Li et al., 2010; Misra et al., 2003).

Loneliness, depression, and stress. Although many countries, such as India and China, send large groups of students abroad for higher education, some international students may find themselves the only citizen of their country attending a university, or even residing in a community. Students from small ethnic or linguistic groups have reported feeling a great deal of pressure or exposure, and have reported believing that they have looser social bonds within their co-national community. Cultural loneliness has been found to interact with and to reinforce personal and social loneliness, especially for students who live in relatively remote locations. This type of student is in particular need of support (Erichsen & Bollinger, 2010; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Li et al., 2010; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Loneliness is better understood when cultural variations and intercultural settings are taken into account. What many students lack is contact with people who care about them personally, and with whom they are able to communicate at a personal level (Erichsen & Bollinger, 2011; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir et al., 2008).

International students have tended to evaluate their current and previous physical and mental health positively, and do not tend to report studying abroad as

detrimental to feelings of health and well-being. Health-related risk practices such as unprotected sexual activity, drug use, smoking, and gambling are uncommon among the international student population (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Wang, 2009). Stress-related adjustment among international graduate students may possibly be balanced by cognitive maturity, since most international students are older and may be better able to cope with stress (Ramsay et al., 2007; Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). The high cognitive scores of international students and their demonstrated past experiences of academic success tends to confirm that most are capable and adjusted college students, who have positive feelings of self-efficacy (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Li et al., 2010; Misra et al., 2003; Wang, 2009; Zhang & Mi, 2009).

Relationships with other students.

Although international students travel abroad specifically for their education and careers, they frequently express interest in developing relationships with host country students. However, many international students have reported disappointment in their failure to establish strong friendships with local students (Brown, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Ramsay et al., 2007; Sawir et al. 2008; Trice, 2003; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). The strength and number of strong ties with host country students has been positively correlated with self-esteem among international students. Nevertheless, many international students perceive that opportunities for interaction are often limited by language, host culture differences, the number of co-nationals the student has access to, whether the student has a family to rely upon or to care for, and previous cross-cultural experiences (Al-

Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Brown, 2009; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lee et al., 2004; Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Trice, 2004; Zhao et al., 2005)

Home students' point of view

A barrier to interaction with U.S. students may be closely related to insecurities of United States students. U.S college and university students have expressed concerns about being perceived as stupid or politically incorrect, especially in early stages of group interactions. American and British students often feel a strong taboo exists around discussions of diversity, so experiences of self-censorship also occur (Brown, 2009, Peacock & Harrison, 2009).

U.S. students surveyed expressed the belief that they benefitted when international students were able to share their knowledge of different countries, social and political systems, and cultural customs and practices. International students are described as more engaged in university and academic life than are American students, and have been viewed by American students as having a strong work ethic (Dunne, 2009; Trice, 2003; Zhao et al., 2005).

British students have reported that their attitudes were changed by social contact with international students. Students who had less contact with the international student population were more likely to rely on stereotyping as a basis for intergroup judgments (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Students in the Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern study expressed feelings of curiosity about international students, and found many of them to be inspiring. British and American students reported the belief that international students had high levels of maturity.

The experience of living and studying abroad was regarded with respect by students who were in a more culturally comfortable environment. International students were valued for their ability to provide academic assistance, including language learning and different perspectives, and for their contributions to cultural interest and awareness. American and British students reported that associations with international students caused them to develop interests in travel, culture, and foreign language learning (Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). One factor that has been related to the perceived maturity of international students may in fact be their maturity. Of the 886,052 international students in the U.S., more than 329,000 are graduate students who are, by definition outside of the traditional age group of university students (NAFSA, 2013).

Conational and other international student friendships. International students have expressed feelings of disappointment in their lack of ability to form relationships among British, American and Australian students. Instead, they tend to seek support among co-national students, or among students from other countries (Brown, 2009; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Peacock & Harrison, 2009). Forming relationships has been described as particularly important for international students, who are far from loved ones or from their social networks, and who may already have been experiencing cultural loneliness. Students who do the best have been those who found at least one individual at the institution or in the community who could provide some degree of personal or social support (Sawir et al., 2008).

The shared experience of being from the same country or culture, while experiencing the dislocation of conducting a life and an education in another place,

has been a source of powerful bonds. These bonds frequently orient many international students towards co-cultural friendships and relationships (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Ramsay et al., 2007). Forming ethnic communities is an important strategy that may serve as a buffer from difficulties associated with lack of assimilation, or from few opportunities to interact with other students. Social communication with conational peers is a predictor of academic success for international students as a whole, although the level of social connectedness has tended to vary according to students' home cultures (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Li et al., 2010).

In a rare study focusing solely on international graduate students, Le and Gardner found that even a small group of peers with whom to interact seemed to sustain students through their academic progress and social life. One of the other major findings of this study was the emphasis these students placed on the role of friends and family in their graduate student experiences (2010).

International Student Individuality and Identity

Individuality.

An emerging issue in literature regarding international students has addressed how to best serve them as the individuals they are. Even co-national students from large and diverse countries may not share a common first language, religious beliefs, or culture. Researchers are beginning to understand that assuming all students have the same difficulties may not be the best approach to assisting international student adjustment (Montgomery, 2009; Sawir et al., 2008). Scholars have recently begun to ask why the international student must bear the primary responsibility for adapting to

higher education environments, and how much reciprocal responsibility institutions and institutional representatives may owe to international students individually, and as populations (Erichsen & Bollinger, 2010; Lee, 2010; Sawir et al. 2008, Strang, 2009).

International Student Identity

International student as an identity status has emerged as an important factor in overall student experience. International students have tended to be invested in the desire of who they want to become - whether it is to be better practitioners in their field, to become more competent in English, or whether it is to become individuals who have status and power – in their roles as representatives of their countries or cultures. Students have left families and lives behind. Some make a significant financial sacrifice. International students have spoken of becoming different people, or of becoming cultural hybrids that have been changed by their experiences (Dunne, 2009; Koehne, 2005; Le & Gardner, 2010). Students have reported feeling as if they are expected to be representatives of their country (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Zhou & Todman, 2009).

International Graduate Students

International graduate students have reported feeling that there is little support offered to them by higher education institutions. Instead, institutional offices and organizations which serve international students have tended to focus resources on traditional-aged undergraduates. International graduate students have reflected upon moments in the classroom when they felt as though they did not belong, have sensed their differences, have felt unwanted, or were simply ignored. This population of

students has found fewer opportunities to become involved in university life than their undergraduate peers. Financial and student visa pressures often contribute to students' needs to quickly work through their programs, resulting in heavier course loads. International graduate students have reported feeling the need to work harder than other graduate students to meet requirements and to finish research projects in a timely manner. International graduate students have described being physically exhausted from working through material, from reading course content several times, and from staying long hours in their offices and labs, leaving them little energy for social activities (Dunne, 2009; Erichsen & Bollinger, 2010; Lee, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003).

A moderately well-known and yet controversial area of research has explored qualities of international graduate assistant instructors. International graduate assistants have been criticized for having poor language skills, and less frequently, for taking financial and research opportunities at the expense of American students. Borjas (2000) found a negative correlation in documenting the impact of foreign-born teaching assistants on the achievement of U.S. undergraduates. In other studies, U.S. students have rated their foreign-born instructors highly in knowledge and social skills, but have given them poor marks for communication skills and teaching ability (Alberts, 2008; Jenkins, 2000; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Neves & Sanyal, 1991). However, older students, international students, and students with higher grade-point averages have found foreign-born instructors to be at least as effective in teaching as native-born instructors (Fleischer, Hashimoto, & Weinberg, 2002; Marvasti, 2007; Rubin, 1992).

International graduate students are increasingly relied upon for research and teaching in higher education. Because native-born students are permitted to go directly into nonacademic careers, and because international students' careers are constrained by their visas, international graduate students are often given a wide range of teaching and research responsibilities. Legal barriers imposed by visas have attracted international students towards remaining in higher education and research institutions (Chelleraj et al., 2008; Finn, 2012; Freeman, 2005).

Graduate Student-Faculty Relationships

In a sense, all graduate students are academic travelers. Few remain at their doctoral institutions for an entire academic career. They complete their degrees, and then they move on (Sato & Hodge, 2009). A primary experience for all graduate students is to learn the culture of the environment, of the institution, of the discipline, and of the individual academic department. Individual academic disciplines and departments frequently have their own cultural mores and norms, which students recognize as they begin to learn ways of interacting and forming peer relationships. All graduate students face similar challenges (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Gardner, 2010b; Le & Gardner, 2010; Lechuga, 2011; Montgomery 2009; Myles & Cheng, 2005; Strang, 2009).

Socialization and Identity

Traditional doctoral education is built upon an apprenticeship model. One role of graduate school is to socialize a student into the culture of their chosen discipline, both professionally and academically (Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008). Many faculty members appear to take active roles in their graduate

students' career advancement. Activities such as attending and presenting at conferences, participating in other structured events including attending seminars, completing internships, and working with external professionals are encouraged.

Some advisors participate in other aspects of graduate student socialization, which may include preparing their doctoral students for careers after graduation, encouraging them to practice interviews and to organize presentations, and offering advice on developing curriculum vitae. However, not all graduate programs are conducted in the same way. Some advisors focus exclusively on research. All doctoral programs, and all advisors, are different; each may have highly varied priorities (Gardner, 2010a; Gardner, 2010b; Rose, 2007; Schlosser et al., 2011a; Sedlacek et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2008).

Although graduate students learn from observing and interacting with their faculty advisors, as in the apprenticeship model, this is not a systematic arrangement. Graduate students rely heavily on others, such as peers, family, and friends, to help interpret their experiences in graduate school. The absences of formal professional development opportunities, minimal feedback or mentoring from faculty, and lack of opportunities for formal reflection, are all disadvantages of the apprenticeship model (Walker et al., 2008). Although some fortunate students have faculty mentors to shepherd them through the process, most do not (Austin, 2002). Even within the community of doctoral students, there are rarely formal organizations in which students may interact and develop mutually supportive or career-advancing relationships (Gardner 2010a). Susan K. Gardner has observed the similarities in doctoral students' development as independent researchers, in their relationships with

their advisors and with their cohorts. She hypothesizes that there is a schema of development associated with doctoral students of all backgrounds (Gardner, 2007; Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2010a; Gardner, 2010b).

Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013) emphasize the potential importance of advisors on the adjustment of international doctoral students in developing strong and supportive networks for student success. Developing familiarity with research and academic culture is a particular source of stress and concern (Erichsen & Bollinger, 2011; Lechuga, 2011). The faculty advisor has been the primary means of graduate student socialization (Jaeger et al., 2011; Rose, 2005; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Schlosser et al., 2011a; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). Among the international students who comprise a growing proportion of graduate students in science and business fields, their enculturation into the academic community of their departments and institutions is critical for their educational and career advancement (Rose, 2005; Strang, 2009).

Finally, graduate socialization is changing. Many students are in programs that are interdisciplinary. Balancing engagement and supervision across departments, colleges, and campuses is increasingly necessary. Each individual student-advisor relationship must agree how they will best navigate cultures that may potentially lack compatibility (Biden, Borrego, & Newswander, 2011).

Communication.

Communication with faculty members and the fostering of trusting, collaborative relationships with professors and supervisors are central to the socialization process for all graduate students (Gardner, 2010a; Gardner, 2010b;

Lechuga, 2011; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). However, studies have reported that these needs are often felt more strongly by international graduate students, particularly when it comes to writing papers and working on dissertations (Huang, 2010; Le & Gardner, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Rose, 2005; Shen & Herr, 2004; Strang, 2009; Trice, 2003).

Faculty Perceptions of International Graduate Students.

Although focus on language abilities has been problematic, most faculty members have reported regarding their international graduate students with respect, and as vital both for research and for retaining high institutional standards (Jenkins, 2000; Trice, 2003; Trice & Yoo, 2007). Because increasing numbers of faculty members, especially in disciplines related to science, engineering, and mathematics, were themselves international students, it is possible that future advisors will have higher levels of intercultural competence either through working with peers from other countries, or through personal experiences (Chelleraj et al., 2008; Freeman, Jin, & Shen, 2004; Trice, 2003).

From the perspective of classroom participation, some international students are viewed by professors as less willing to participate. Some may participate less because of language barriers: a less fluent student may need time to frame thoughts, and may miss discussion opportunities. Other students have cultures which do not promote participation or questioning an instructor in front of the class, and instructors need to be aware of this difference (Marlina, 2009).

Another difficulty which faculty researchers have reported has been related to funding. In times of budget shortfalls the struggle to keep a valued student-researcher

funded can be challenging. Students may not be aware of the limitations of an advisor's power. Some types of grants also restrict access by international students, complicating research and departmental priorities (Rice et al., 2009; Trice, 2003).

International Students' Expectations of Faculty Relationships

International students and their academic advisors may have different perceptions of the ideal role of the advisor (Rose, 2005; Strang, 2009; Timko et al., 1991; Trice & Yoo, 2007). For many international students, the primary relationship within the academic community is with their professors and co-researchers, and particularly with their advisors (Abe et al. 1998; Bartram, 2007; Gardner, 2010a; Gardner, 2007; Kim, 2011; Le & Gardner, 2010; Misra et al., 2003; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Rice et al., 2009; Rose, 2005; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Strang, 2009; Timko et al. 1991; Trice, 2004; Trice & Yoo, 2007; Zhou & Todman, 2009).

The assistance which an advisor is able to offer a graduate student, particularly an international graduate student, can be of significant value. Assets which advisors may have the power to share may include access to individuals, institutions and resources, information about how "things are done," as well as emotional and moral support (Rice et al., 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Shen & Herr, 2004; Trice, 2004; Trice & Yoo, 2007). Students have reported studying abroad specifically for the opportunity to work with a particular professor or researcher (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Kim, 2011). International students may long for or even expect deep personal relationships with their advisors (Huang, 2010; Kim, 2011; Rice et al., 2009). Among students from some – mostly Asian – cultures, the role of the

advisor is likened to that of a parent, with all the emotional expectations and inevitable disappointments which this role may entail (Wei, Tsai, Chai, Du, & Lin, 2012).

The relationship may not be a universally positive one. International students have reported changing their faculty advisors because of lack of cultural sensitivity, language barriers, or harassment. For students who rely upon their institutions for assistantships, many report feeling vulnerable and dependent upon individual faculty members' good will (Jenkins, 2000; Kim, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Rice et al., 2009). Students may be forced to change programs just to receive funding they may have been promised (Lee & Rice, 2007). The power relationship is one which most students have reported being conscious of. Cultural barriers to approaching an advisor, much less confronting one, may be quite high (Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, Lee, & Tedeschi, 1996; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Rice et al., 2009; Trice, 2004).

International graduate students are highly concerned about job placement, possibly because successful job placement would ensure permanent visa opportunities (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). This group of students tends to be very reliant upon sources from within their own academic disciplines, including instructors and advisors. Advisors among this population are valued when they support conference attendance and publication. Advisors are also appreciated when they can relate meaningful work opportunities within the institution to students' past or future work needs back home (Shen & Herr, 2004). The advising relationship for international graduate students is frequently a difficult one because of social and cultural barriers,

conflicting needs and priorities, and of expectations which may or may not be met (Sato & Hodge, 2009).

In an ideal environment, mentoring and excellent advising are essentially the same function. The most successful graduate school relationships are characterized by shared assumptions and expectations on the parts of the advisor/mentor and the advisee/protégé (Johnson, 2002). In the academic world, negative student-faculty relationships are probably advising relationships which never coalesce into mentorship.

Advising

Advisors are frequently gatekeepers who have the power to determine when a student may publish or graduate (Huang, 2010). The extent of the advisor's involvement in the life of any student may vary greatly. The advising relationship may affect a students' career because advisors have the potential to influence research, publication, professional development, and networking (Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003). An advisor may only help the student with course selection, and limit her or his interactions to this purpose. On the other hand, the faculty member may perceive his or her task very broadly and be willing to guide the student through coursework, comprehensive examinations, and the dissertation process. The advisor may also assist the student developing a program of research and in forming professional contacts (Kim, 2011; Lechuga, 2011; Rose, 2005; Schlosser et al., 2011a).

Mentoring

A close relationship between a faculty member and a graduate student forms the foundation for much of graduate education. It frequently has a lasting effect on the graduate students' lives, whether positive or negative (Rose, 2005; Wrench & Punyanunt, 2004). For many students, graduate school is regarded as a continuation of the apprentice-master model, similar to learning a trade. Variations upon the apprenticeship relationship are of great importance, particularly to the student.

The qualitative difference in graduate-level mentoring is also significant because mentors are more likely to be invested in their graduate-level mentees. Due to the potential length of the relationship, the possibility that the protégé may one day become a colleague, and complexity and sophistication of graduate student thinking abilities, the relationship has a strong potential to develop reciprocity (Rose, 2007; Schlosser et al., 2011a; Sedlacek et al., 2007). Mentoring includes both career functions and psychosocial functions (Jaeger et al., 2011; Johnson, 2002) and in this sense it is very close to Gardner's descriptions of doctoral socialization (Gardner, 2010a; Gardner 2010b).

Schlosser et al. (2011a) make three distinctions between advising and mentoring: setting, proximity, and prevalence. Mentoring may occur informally and does not require an academic setting. Advising is often quite formal and occurs within an academic department; the advisor nearly always has a role in the student's academic work. A mentoring relationship is described as inherently positive, while the advisory relationship may not be. Specific traits which graduate students report valuing in ideal mentors may be classified primarily as personal. Personal traits

include having senses of humor or empathy, caring, emotional intelligence, supportiveness, flexibility, competence, and encouragement. In addition to emotional or psychic benefits to students, mentoring includes the development of professional skills, enhanced confidence, a sense of professional identity, scholarly productivity, networking, dissertation success, and satisfaction with one's doctoral program, followed by support, encouragement, and a sense of receiving a blessing on their career journey. Postdoctoral benefits may include income, eminence, more rapid promotion, willingness to mentor others, increased career satisfaction, and a sense of achievement (Johnson, 2002).

The true value of a mentoring relationship is that it is not one-sided. Benefits to the academic mentor may include increased research productivity, increased networking, enhanced professional recognition, career satisfaction, more creativity, and a sense of generativity (Jaeger et al., 2011; Johnson, 2002). Trice (2003) noted that gatekeeping could be a two-way street, reporting that international students are often able to forge connections with their home countries on behalf of visiting scholars and entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Although there is considerable research on various aspects of international undergraduate students, their needs, and student development models, the international graduate students' needs seldom receive close attention. This highly diverse population comprises 42 per cent of the international student population in the United States (IIE, 2012; NAFSA, 2013), and remains relatively underserved by researchers. A body of research is beginning to be developed which describes

graduate student socialization. However, there is little research which addresses the specific concerns of international graduate students, or which distinguishes between advising and mentoring functions.

CHAPTER 3

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how individual international doctoral students described their relationships with their advisors, and to understand what practices and techniques they perceived faculty members at a Midwestern research institution employed to advance students' progress in their doctoral programs. This chapter contains a description of the methodology that was used to explore the described relationships among international doctoral students and their advisors.

The first phase of the study was a Qualtrics survey that was sent out in two separate email blasts through the International Student Services Office (ISSO). The first email went out to all international students in June, and the second was sent out in August. The email linked to the Qualtrics survey. The initial Qualtrics survey is included in Appendix 1.

Ninety-one students responded to the survey; however, only 37 students agreed to be interviewed, and provided contact information. Thirteen of those students eventually either decided not to participate, or could not be contacted after multiple attempts. Ten students were brought into the study through networking with international students; thus a portion of the students were a convenience population.

The second phase of the study was comprised of interviews with individual students. Because doctoral programs are individual, students may be easily identified based on their college, field of study, national origin, and gender. Therefore, identifiers have been carefully obscured. The purpose of the interviews was to

explore the experiences of individual international graduate students through a series of one-on-one in-depth interviews, and to use lived experiences of students to describe positive and negative relationships. Students also described their lived experiences as international doctoral students at the institution, and as residents living in the civic community. This research may be used to develop or guide best practices in advisement of international doctoral students, and to inform higher education student affairs professionals of the needs of international doctoral students.

Deriving a Sample Population

The students were contacted through the ISSO; they were asked to complete a brief online survey [Appendix 1]. The primary advantage of a quantitative survey for the purposes of this study, other than discovering general levels of satisfaction with doctoral programming and advising of international students, was to identify a population of students who are willing to discuss their experiences and insights. Although the subsequent sample population was limited to students who completed the survey *and* who were willing to discuss their experiences, the survey was a way to contact students from a university-wide population. Thirty-six students agreed to tell their stories. The students' stories are the means through which their worlds may be entered, and by which their experiences may be interpreted and made meaningful (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990).

Qualitative Research and Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative methods were used in this exploratory study. I sought to describe and to understand interactions and interpretations related to the lived experiences of international doctoral students. The study was exploratory because little university-

wide research has been conducted regarding the specific needs and concerns of this population of students in relation to their advising experiences. The study is significant because international graduate students comprise approximately 23% of all graduate students at the Midwestern research institution (Office of Institutional Research, 2014), and comprise approximately half of the international graduate students in the United States (IIE, 2014; NAFSA, 2013).

I used a paradigm of naturalistic inquiry to allow the construction of knowledge with the study participants. The assumption in naturalistic inquiry is that knowledge exists within the meaning that is attached to the phenomenon under examination (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Understanding of international doctoral student relationships with their advisors may be constructed from the perceptions of individuals immediately involved in this relationship; in this case, international doctoral students.

Qualitative methods allow the researcher to listen to the expressed experiences of international doctoral students within a natural setting; these methodologies are best for understanding the processes of a situation as well as understanding the beliefs and perceptions of those in it (Firestone, 1993). Qualitative methods are also important ways of integrating multiple perspectives, of developing a holistic understanding of how a system works, and of constructing knowledge of how students interpret their experiences (Weiss, 1994). Qualitative inquiry embraces the idea of multiple realities, including the use of multiple forms of evidence. It assumes evidence will be subjective, and will be based upon individual views, acknowledging the values the researcher brings to the study. Finally, qualitative methods allow the

researcher to develop a complex and deep understanding of an issue or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The process of narrative inquiry is relational. Allowing people the opportunity to make sense of their experiences within contextual frameworks is the purpose of narrative inquiry. “Narrative inquiries explore the stories people live and tell. These stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). Each person has his own story of who he is, how he is related to others in the world, and how he interprets his experiences based upon that personal story. Thus, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry is primarily a way of thinking about experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained the value of narrative inquiry in studies of educational experience. Because education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, as well as of knowledge, teachers and learners are simultaneously storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. Within the framework of this study teachers and students are always in relationships. These relationships have lasting value and they matter deeply on many levels, regardless of how each participant may experience the relationship. The experiences that accumulate within each teacher and within each student are mutually influential, cumulative, and always in flux (Giles, 2011). Narrative interpretation of experiences and events extends the understanding of a story by placing it within a contextual framework (Polkinghorne, 2007). This study will seek to create knowledge which

may be transferable both within and across institutional disciplines, and across institutions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Phenomenological research

Two core elements of phenomenology are intentionality and reflection. Sartre said, "People are condemned to freedom" (Becker, 1992, p. 15). Even not choosing is a choice. Similarly, reflection is part of human nature. Not only are people aware of themselves, they are aware of their awareness: we are reflective, and self-reflective. An active, experiencing person is the subject, not the object, because a person is at the core of every human action. The person at the heart of the narrative acts, rather than is acted upon. People create and co-create their lives, they react to life events, and they shape life events (Becker, 1992).

Phenomenological research begins with two premises. First, human experiences are understandable and make sense to those who live them. Second, the sense or logic of human experience is inherent in the experience itself, and is not something which is constructed by an outside observer (Dukes, 1984). Human experience is meaningful to those who live it and its meaning is there to be "seen," and grasped directly.

Phenomenological research emphasizes subjective experiences, and seeks individual perceptions and experiences of a phenomenon in search of the common meaning. It is the study of the way members of a community interpret their lives or their world. According to Creswell (2013), data collection in a phenomenological study involves multiple, in-depth interviews of up to 25 people. The features of phenomenological research are

- Emphasizing the phenomenon to be explored
- Exploration of a group whose members have all experienced the same phenomenon
- Containing a philosophical discussion of the basic ideas involved
- The researcher brackets herself out of the study by discussing personal experiences within the phenomenon
- Data collection usually involves interviewing
- Data analysis follows systematic procedures
- The research ends with a descriptive passage which discusses the essence of the experience for individuals, incorporating the “what” and “how” of experiences

The task of phenomenology is to understand with the goal of explanation, or discovery of the missing link which renders empirical observations or correlations intelligible (Dukes, 1984). Among international doctoral students who may have different cultural experiences and expectations, established truths may lose their inevitability (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Qualitative Interviews

Author and ethnographer Kirin Narayan (2003) observed that the word “interview,” at some point in our past, meant “to see one another.” “Although we cannot ignore the social hierarchies of inquiry, we want to underscore how ‘seeing one another’ in interviews requires close attentiveness and an openness to the supposes of dialogue and exchange” (p. 454). Chirban (1996) regarded the interview as an “inner view.” Similarly, Weiss (1994) noted that interviewing gives the

researcher access to the observations of others, as well as to their inner experiences. Through interviewing, we can “learn about settings that would otherwise be closed to us: foreign societies, exclusive organizations, and the private lives of couples and families” (p. 2). Events and experiences have various interpretations across cultures. Learning to “see” is beginning to “understand” (Ward et al., 2001).

This was a study which sought to describe a common, lived phenomenon. Thirty-four subjects were interviewed. The subjects were selected both through a quantitative, online survey, as well as network sampling. Qualitative interviews employed recursive, flexible, and ever-changing sets of questions that were tailored for each respondent; the researcher had the opportunity to observe non-verbal responses and gestures, thus gaining coherence, depth, and density of the material which each respondent provided (Seidman, 2013). Ways of seeking depth, detail, and vivid descriptions are essential to successfully completing a meaningful interview (Creswell, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Weiss, 1994).

The qualitative interviews allowed time for participants to consider and explore the meaning of events, how they felt at the time, and how they interpreted their feelings upon reflection. The results of interviews were creations of interactions between the interviewer and the participant. The resulting interviews were commentaries which uncovered meaning, and revealed the context and environment which may have shaped the participant’s first-hand understanding of an experience or event (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Interviews

Interview sessions were approximately one hour in length. Students were asked 22 open-ended questions [Appendix 2]. The responses to these questions were recorded and transcribed. Students were then be given the opportunity to review their responses. Student reactions to questions were noted. Before the data was analyzed, I transcribed all interviews and research notes, and I created password-protected Microsoft Word files, which were saved on my personal computer. The computer is password protected. I used coding based upon meaning, instead of line-by-line, or question-by question.

Validation Strategies

Creswell (2003) recommended several strategies for ensuring validity of the study. For this study, triangulation, rich, thick, descriptions, and peer-debriefing were used. Triangulation included recordings, transcripts, and the researcher's observations. The rich, thick descriptions were provided by using the interviewees' own voices in addressing each theme, as well as detailed descriptions of each subject.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the IRB of the University of Nebraska. Although there were no identifiable risks, three considerations were attended to when dealing with international doctoral students. First, the assurance of confidentiality was sovereign: students needed the freedom to share their experiences. Without belief in confidentiality, there could be no validity. Second, the students were not be expected to have first-language, colloquial English at their command. In consideration of this, more time and effort was required to

ensure that no advantage was taken of students, and that students were absolutely comfortable with the conditions of the interview. Although most students' command of the English language was quite good, at times I paraphrased remarks for sense and clarity. I also was continually mindful that these were highly intelligent individuals, and for many non-native English speakers, there is a fear of being perceived as less intelligent because of language difficulties. I was interested in protecting not only the students' confidentiality, but also the accuracy of their meaning. I also had no interest in trying to make anyone look foolish because a concept was expressed in a way an outside reader may find "cute." Finally, besides the written agreement, students were verbally informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

Ethical interviewers have an obligation to deal ethically with their interviewees, to treat them with respect, and to honor any promises which may be made. Neutrality was not possible, but forming a human relationship generates an ethical obligation, which included reciprocal openness on the part of the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I examined only the experiences of international doctoral students. Their perceptions and adaptations are their reflections of their individual experiences. Further, this research only explored a single side of the advising relationship. Faculty advisors are vital, but I did not attempt to seek out the perspectives of the advisors of the students in this study. Although the advisors certainly have important stories to relate, this was a one-sided study. Results may be transferrable, but they may not be generalizable.

The Role and Background of the Researcher

In qualitative research, it is important to share and acknowledge any personal biases which may influence collection and interpretation of the data. The naturalistic paradigm asserts that inquiry is value-bound, and influenced by the values of the inquirer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I come from a small, Midwestern city, from a family with very conservative and traditional views about nearly everything. Although I rebelled against my upbringing, my family's faith, and my community, they are all irrevocably part of me. From my earliest childhood, however, I felt a compulsion to seek a larger world. I have sought multicultural friendships, studied languages, and travelled.

In my sophomore year at the University of Nebraska I met an international student, whom I later married. Experiencing both the United States and higher education through his own experiences was an influential awakening for me after living a relatively sheltered life. My life partner's doctoral experiences were influenced by a number of institutional and personal challenges, some of which could certainly have been mitigated by a different advising relationship than the one he actually experienced. His relationship with his faculty advisor can only be characterized as difficult.

As the spouse of a professor who works primarily with international advisees, I spend a great deal of personal time reading, editing, and advising international graduate students in their writing of theses, dissertations, and publications. I have an awareness of the difficulties which international students face in trying to develop a career in this country. I volunteer as an English teacher of immigrants and refugees,

so I am sensitized to the complications people face when communicating in a non-native language. As a native speaker of English, I try never to assume that I am fully understood, or that I fully understand every statement which I hear. I am aware of potential difficulties of communicating in a non-native language.

I value international higher education as a driver of the United States' economy, as a vehicle of innovation in higher education and in research, as a means of cultural exchange and of developing intercultural competence among all students, and as a force for social change and justice in this country and abroad. The inclusion of international students throughout U.S. higher education is a strong priority for me.

Despite its conservatism, my family upbringing prioritized the value of both inquiry and of doing the right thing. Similarly, my religious upbringing emphasized personal, social, and economic justice, all concerns which guide my principles today. International students are a benefit to American students, to higher education generally, and a potential benefit to the American economy. It is important to me that they are treated fairly and justly.

Chapter 4

Positive Advising Experiences

Interviews with 34 international doctoral students produced more than 1000 pages of double-spaced transcripts. Throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing, and coding the interviews, I developed themes from prefigured categories: positive experiences, negative experiences, communication, power, and growth. Subthemes were derived from student statements that emerged throughout the interviews.

Students were asked in the Qualtrics questionnaire what their advisor's home country was; this question was later explored in the interview. Students considered this important. Some students had strong opinions about the value of their advising, based upon their advisor's national origin. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the relationships.

Table 1

Students and Their Advisors

Students with more than 1 advisor	Students with co-national advisor	Students with at least 1 American advisor	Students whose advisor is neither American nor co-national
7	6	23	10

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the national origin of the students by region. Two students were the only citizens of their countries who attended the institution; therefore, confidentiality agreements preclude using specific national labels. National

origins of students will be included in this paper, but only in cases in which the student remarks require such identification for context.

Table 2

Students' origins

Region	Number of Students
China	12
Other Asian countries, including India	6
Africa	3
Middle East	8
Central/South America	5

In this chapter are examples of positive experiences students reported when they began to initiate their relationships with their advisors. The relationship that a doctoral student shares with his or her advisor is highly personal. First experiences appear to have been very important in the way some students have interpreted these relationships. Although research and writing are critical, other experiences may also be relevant to successful academic careers: teaching, support, career advising, and mentoring are all possible elements of this relationship. In this chapter, students will describe their positive experiences in their programs of study.

Finding an Advisor

An orderly search

The first step students reported facing was that of finding a position and a teacher. Some students focused their search towards a particular research area or topic of interest. For this group, the process was orderly and purposeful. One student went through the Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings and contacted 200 institutions in the United States, Europe, and Canada. Based upon the number of responses, and upon

encouragement from advisors in his own country, he determined that the American respondents were the more prestigious choices.

Each university engineering department, the professors who are interested in [my field], I said to them, “I’m interested in being here. This is my degree, this is my qualification, and what do you think?” Thirty of them had replied, “You are ok,” and I applied for ten universities in the States based on this. I got a very good assistantship from [institution] and the living expenses here are good. [Yusuf]

His advisor was the only faculty member who shared his research interests, and so the student knew in advance who he would be working with.

A student who was already studying in the United States decided she needed a better fit for her interests than she had at her institution. She had obtained her BS in her home country, and was accepted to an institution in the Rocky Mountain region to work on her Master’s degree. After a year, she concluded that the school she had chosen was not a good fit. She also had hoped to pursue a doctorate, which the institution did not offer in her field.

I wanted to pursue a higher degree. So I just started to search on Google and I did all the graduate school applications by myself. I just kind of searched a major. And I found [advisor] and I went to the [university] page and I started to go through all the applications and procedures. And at the end . . . she just emailed me [to see] if I have time to talk to her. It was a phone interview, and we talked for half an hour, and then she invited me to make a visit to her lab. I had a whole day tour, actually around the department, not the campus. I

talked to all the graduate students and post docs in the lab, and I just feel like I can have a happy work environment here. [Luli]

In the case of this student, she was very impressed that the advisor took time to not only make an invitation, but also ensured that she met students before she made the choice to transfer.

For a student who wanted to study abroad, she was attracted by the faculty, but a video caught her attention.

I decided to come to the states because there are more universities here. Then I just started preparing but I didn't know where to get started, so I just went online and found all those articles about school here. I found a list of schools. I looked for faculty members who had similar interests to me. And [state] was one, like surprising to me, and I watched a video online, where Bill Gates and Warren Buffet came to [university], and they talked about the students. So I was watching their interactions with the video, and I thought which school is that, and I went online, and found my advisor. She also does cross-cultural research and I have always been interested in parenting stuff and she does a little bit of that so I just feel like she was a really good fit for me. I went ahead and contacted her, and she was really positive and she told me she was going to accept a student. I went ahead and applied, and she accepted me.

[Meili]

Purposefulness

For other students their advisor was a specific choice, based upon the advisor's scholarship and the student's interests. Again, the students employed their

research experience, but frequently choices were made because of other contacts, such as friends or acquaintances who recommended a specific individual, or who served as gateways for the student. Many careers are very narrowly focused, and selecting an advisor is frequently a very specific and personal task. Several students met their advisors either at conferences, or when the advisors were travelling abroad. “I choose the advisor when I applied for this college. I looked up all the faculty here to see what area I was most interested in.” [Huan]

When I applied I had a choice between [two different programs]. So in the end it was really the advisor card . . . and the fact that he was familiar with [professor] who I’m working with right now. So she put a good word to him for me and in a way it was kind of a bridging. I didn’t have to work so hard to make him happy or have him accept me as an advisee. And in the other programs I didn’t know anyone over there that I can network with and find out what’s going on and what they really want from an applicant, stuff like that. In my application letter I told [Department Chair] I wanted to work with a specific advisor and no one else. [Selena]

One student chose his advisor in part because a friend recommended her, and because her work and interests were compatible with his. “Her research field is very connected to my previous studies.”

And also, I have some previous colleague who was here before, and we get to know each other, and he said it’s a good place to do research, and that she is a good advisor. The main reason is the research here is related to my interests. I had my Master’s degree before I came to the United States. My previous

advisor, they knew each other - if you count the people or the labs who do the same thing as you, then there are maybe two or three or five at most in the world. [Liko]

Academics travel, and many students found their advisors through contact abroad. One student's school hosted a group of professors from [university]. "I met my advisor because people from [university] came to the place where I used to work, they came to them."

And I was there, the head of the department of science in high school. And I met Dr. ___ there and I showed her my school and she said that she was working here and in science education, and oh you're interested in studying. So I contacted her and she helped me a lot to understand the program and she offered me the research assistantship. So in a way I met her before coming here and she helped me a lot to understand about the Ph.D. and the program and I think that I am here a lot because of her. [Olivia]

Similarly, An Asian student first heard her advisor speak at her university. The advisor seemed open to hosting international students, and the student contacted her. "She gave a talk at the university . . . and her studies interested me, and she was saying if anyone is interested to come to [institution] and do their Ph.D. work, to just contact her."

So I researched her. I was aware of her projects, and I thought I was a good fit, so I emailed her, asked her about enrollment procedures. . . . Even before I applied to [institution], I was already in communication with them. I met [other advisor] in Seattle for a conference, so that was April 2013 and the

application was not until September 2013. So she gave me a background of the program, if I could fit in the program, all those things. And [advisor] was also in constant communication with me . . . they seem very much like they, they want *me* to get what could be the best out of [institution]. [Lowella]

When I was applying I went through a lot of processes? And there are not a lot of programs that fit my interest. I kind of learned about him [advisor] and learned about his research area from this person who was my supervisor at the time. So I kind of got in touch with him, and I applied to quite a few places but I wound up coming here because it was something I really wanted. It feels like the right place for me to be. [Nuwa]

Because [at home] I have already had my research project and direction, so I saw a lot of papers. I thought, this professor is doing almost the same thing as me, so I just send him the email. [Song]

I was working on my master's thesis [in home country] and we are looking for some data. I was searching via internet, and I found Dr. _____ in this department, and I asked him if it's possible he sends me some data so we could analyze it. And he generously sent us some data and it worked and I defended my master's thesis. Dr. _____ suggested to me that I can come over here to pursue my Ph.D. program. Unfortunately after three months Dr. _____ got a new job at Harvard and he had to leave. I applied to some other universities and computer science but, along this procedure I found Dr. _____ who is my current advisor here. That is why I'm staying here yet, because

I'm working with Dr. ___, but I have another advisor in computer science I'm studying over there. [Mehrana]

Advisor selection is random

Students may be chosen by their advisors as well. Individual professors or departments have funding which may be allocated for particular types of research. Some students may be better suited than others for some types of research.

When I got admission from [institution] I started looking for finding an assistantship. I asked the secretary of the department about this, and besides I asked the graduate advisor of our program and he told the secretary to forward my email to other professors. At that time my advisor was looking for a graduate student for his project. He had a new research project at that time and I mean, I think when he saw my request he responded to me and we set up a time for a phone interview. Not an interview but a conversation. And actually I signed the contract before coming here but it was after getting admission. [Yusuf]

I just sent my application documents - I think those documents go to our department generally, and my advisor just sent me email to ask if I am interested in his line of research. I am very lucky. Most people in [country] contact their advisor first, so it's a very little chance to find an interested advisor. So I am very lucky my advisor just thought maybe, he saw material and thought I might be OK to work here. I just check his website and his publications, and I see he's from a top university, and a top major, and he

works on [area], and that is my interest and it is just perfect. A gift from God.

[Yun]

Finally, other students relied upon random chance, and in their cases, they were fortunate. “So when I came here and I went to the department and I asked who is my advisor.” [Aninda]

It was luck of the draw I guess. When I applied I was living [at home], I was working there, and although I did grad school in U.S., because I did my masters in Kentucky, the system there did not necessarily prepare me for what you should have done for this. I dealt with applying for this grad school no differently than I did applying for undergrad—my masters. I really and truly did not research any of the professors and I came in with some misconceptions. So I was truly an example of the luck of the draw. And then I got the professor as an advisor who was most leaning towards things I was most interested in [Sophia]

Originally it was just a list of names and I chose the name I thought sounded fun. I had him as a master’s student and then I left him after my master’s degree to work with someone else that didn’t work out as well, and I went back to him. So I actually moved away from him and then back to him.

[Dawud]

First Encounters

Other than academic interest, the first characteristic that an international student observes about his or her advisor is national origin. Twenty, or nearly two-thirds of the students had at least one American advisor. Six had advisors from their

native country, and seven had advisors from a third country. For the students who had American advisors, most regarded this either as an expectation, or as a positive characteristic. However, students whose advisors were from other countries also appreciated the empathy and convenience of having a professor who could appreciate their shared experience.

An African student had never met his advisor until his advisor picked him up from the airport. “My advisor, he received from the airport, and he took me to HIS house. That is very kind of him.” The student stayed at his advisor’s home until he found a roommate and an apartment.

This is a general kind of rule for Iranian students, when they search for faculty members, the first they prefer to find an American faculty member or professor, and then try to find an Iranian faculty member, and then other countries. Now after three years I think that might be logical. [Hamid]

I think an advisor from the same country has - I think it doesn’t help me to improve my English if he speaks to me in English. I think it’s good for me that he can talk to me in Chinese. It’s important, but also there are many other opportunities to practice English. And its most important thing for people to learn foreign language is to pay attention by themselves. [Feng]

I like her, she’s very nice, and probably because she is not a native speaker either - she is from [another country] - so she can understand about international students. But she started her Ph.D. in the United States. The post doc after that, and then assistant professor. [Luli]

Finally, one student noted that, because so many international professors were trained in the United States, they had embraced American academic culture and tended to advise like western faculty members. This was, she said, “A good thing.” [Marzieh]

Documentation

An advisor’s first job may be to assist the new student with documentation for their visas, a process that not every professor is familiar with. One student reported that his advisor was eventually able to assist him in claiming refugee status, which made his experiences with funding more secure: he was able to apply for permanent residency and potentially had access to student loans and to unlimited outside employment. Although he eventually hopes and expects to return to his home country, his special status has been a tremendous personal advantage to him. A more complete discussion of visa types will be detailed in Chapter 7.

Although the International Student Services Office (ISSO) and the Graduate Admissions Office are instrumental in guiding paperwork, faculty members are also often called upon to assist international students with paperwork. Another example of an advisor taking a proactive role in this is illustrated later in this chapter. One Asian student’s advisor was experienced in addressing student needs. “I think she would always follow up with the department, you know, ‘Have [student’s] papers been sent?’ because she sent it to me that email, so I knew she was following it up.” [Lowella]

One student was certain that her advisor was learning the process through her, and she has often been responsible for explaining her needs and the laws to her

advisor. “I have a feeling this is the first time he’s advising an international student because the first time I had to get my F-1 visa from an F-2 I had to get some endorsements from him that I was accepted into the program.”

So he was like, “What do I have to do to make you come in by the fall as an enrolled F-1 student?” And I’m like, “not sure either but according to the ISSO you have to sign this,” and he goes, “Ok just let me know when I have to do it so I can meet it before the deadline. Give me all the forms and just tell me where to sign.” [Selena]

An African student felt a great indebtedness to his advisor. Yohannes, had not left his native country legally, but because of his country’s political situation, he was eligible for refugee status. An acquaintance had suggested that he was eligible, and the advisor began to initiate the paper work. “And I asked him to write a reference letter. He wrote that letter.”

And because he was communicating with me when I was [home], so what he did was compile all the emails which we had, and I used those as a second reference. He was very helpful. I just honestly told him my problem. But sometimes, I feel bad. Because I was working very hard to attract other [students from my country] to the department. [Yohannes]

Yohannes was concerned that if other students from his country similarly expressed a need for refugee status, his advisor may resent the time and paperwork he would be expected to invest.

A Chinese student who transferred from another state received assistance from her advisor. The advisor also helped her to switch from a Masters into a doctoral

program. “I got other admissions, too. I got one from Georgia State, another one is Purdue, and both of them are Master’s degree programs.”

I applied for Masters here, first, and then [advisor] says, why don’t you want to try the Ph.D.? I was kind of, I didn’t know that it’s OK for bachelors to Ph.D. at that time. I just wanted to be admitted to graduate school, to start my graduate school. And she told me she could help me switch from masters to Ph.D. [Luli]

Orientation

For international students, the first contact with their advisor is a critical time. This is particularly true of students who have never studied abroad. One student reported a great deal of assistance, simply in the personal time the professor gave in orienting her to the campus and the community.

Well you know he is so, so nice. I was told that sometimes the best advisor for you may be - it is not just that he is good in the professional area, but that he has a good heart. Some of my friends have told me, their advisor is mean, so pushy; they don’t have a lot of free time. When I apply here, my professor helped me prepare for the documents very carefully, and he always told me, when I was still [home], he told me, “Don’t push yourself too much right now, because you only have a little time, stay with your friends and family, you know, just relax, and so enjoy the time there.” I think, “Oh, he’s really good.” And when I came here, he show me around the city campus -- this is hard for the professor because he has a really busy schedule -- but he still has some

time to show me around the campus, and tell me some things, like how to find your apartment, and how to learn driving, so he's good. [Song]

Song went on to share that this was part of her advisor's advising culture, and that she now participated as well. When he is away, she has undertaken his role by showing other new advisees around the campus and the labs.

A Chinese student's advisor facilitated a relationship for her, and this intentional relationship eased her introduction to the community and the campus. She appreciated his personal attention when learning how the lab and its procedures operated.

When I come to the U.S., my advisor introduced me to [a conational] person in our lab, and, actually, I call her a sister. He just created a relationship between us, and that helped me a lot. She helped me to find an apartment, and helped me to get started on everything. First I didn't have a car, and so she gave me a ride for shopping and getting to activities and everything like that. At the beginning that helped me a lot. And gradually I got familiar with here, and my car, and I just got used to the apartment conditions and new techniques that worked, that I am not familiar with from [home]. My adviser just taught me himself, in person, to help me to get familiar with the lab things. [Yun]

Traits

Although students had no preconceived notions of their advisors' personalities or instructional methods, advising traits were important considerations for the students. Traits which were particularly valued were

- Depth of knowledge
- Organization and preparation
- Empathy and personal supportiveness
- Clear expectations and feedback
- Friendliness
- Supportiveness of research and student interests
- Responsiveness/accessibility

Depth of knowledge

Because international doctoral students are in the U.S. to study, they are excited to have advisors who are well informed and who can guide them in their studies of the field that they are dedicated to. This may seem obvious, but not all students have advisors who can share their expertise. This topic will be explored in Chapter Five. Most students, however, report being pleased and stimulated by the level of knowledge they have access to.

He is just, I consider him to be a little bit intimidating, because he is so experienced that he thinks ten steps ahead of you. Then he likes to use the Socratic approach. He truly is so intelligent. He will try to get you to see things in his way, but in a way like a coach, you know. He's leading you to where he wants you to be. [Nuwa]

I mean, that made a good relationship with another reliable person, that he knows better than you, he has more experience than you, and he can kind of direct you toward your goals in a good shape. [Hamid]

I can relate to him in a professional sense. The reason I decided to work with him is because his background is similar to mine, so every time we talk he knows what I'm talking about. He can relate to me easily. [Selena]

Organization and preparation:

Advisor preparedness was very highly valued. Perhaps because all but five of the international doctoral students who participated in the study did not speak English as a primary language of education, extra time and preparation was built into their scholarly lives. Time wasted in disorganized meetings or classes was resented by students who did not believe they had time to waste. "Another trait is that he's very structured, which I really appreciate because that way I can plan my life as well, and because I'm structured as well." [Selena]

I think most people think the same, for advisor, its habits, and the way he does things. My advisor is a very careful man and he thinks a lot of his students. So I think it's good for me. [Feng]

She is a good model. All the students from her classes, they all say she is a good teacher and a good advisor. In the class, she prepares well, she tries to answer all the questions. For quizzes, exams, homework, she is reasonable. She gives reasonable points for students, and she tries to help students to obtain knowledge. So that is something I can learn. [Liko]

I like very much Dr. ____ because I think she's very organized in her ideas, so before coming here she was very clear about expectations, like "you need to do this." Before coming here she explained clearly. She's very clear in her instructions like what do you need to do and she's very organized. Of course

when you have a lot of work sometimes organization is an issue and I think that the thinking style of Dr. ___ is very similar to my thinking style. For example in the courses I have with her I like them very much because she shows us all the rubrics and all the assignments we need to do. She's very clear with her instructions and she's flexible. She says, "Ok at the end of the semester when you have to submit all of your assignments, if you need to take time to finish the assignments you can work on our project later." I think that helps you to be more committed. [Olivia]

Empathy and personal supportiveness:

Again, because of structural difficulties for students with little additional time, the ability for an advisor to view the world from the student's point of view was a very important quality. The difficulty of language is frequently an issue for students who are in programs that require a great deal of writing; writing is typically the most difficult type of communication for non-native speakers of any language. "Besides that, he's very easy going, he's very comfortable, most of the time he puts himself in your place and tries to know your feelings." [Hamid] A Middle Eastern student said of her advisor, "My advisor sometimes just comes to my office and says, 'Are you happy here? Do you love what you are doing?' This really feels good for me." [Elaheh]

When I first came here I didn't know a lot about the educational system here. I didn't know about expectations for graduate students. I just didn't know how graduate school worked here. So, I was a little bit shy at first, you know when you first come to a new country, you don't know the social rules, you don't

know how to approach people. My advisor and I, we set up meetings, and she talked about, “O, here are the courses you can take this semester,” but I really didn’t know the expectations for the next five years. So, I didn’t have a time line, and I didn’t know how to ask for that. I think the first thing is, actively reaching out to graduate students? It’s an important trait, because you just don’t know the personalities of your student, you just don’t know what she doesn’t know. [Meili]

One student appreciated that his advisor was patient and even-tempered. The students noted that it was easy to make mistakes, working in a lab. “He has very good policies that I like. He doesn’t yell at you, even when you make a mistake.”

I can see from his face, like when he tries to control his emotion, he tries to bury his voice, he’s not a guy who yells at people. I am like that, too. I believe that people make mistakes, and I don’t want someone to yell at me when my mind is also yelling at me. So I am very comfortable with that. [Yohannes]

A Chinese student said of her advisor, “I would like my advisor to be able to see where I’m coming from.”

Sometimes I really appreciate someone who can be in my shoes, and say, you are having a lot of difficulties in this area. For whatever reason it is, I think that is a key factor I would hope my advisor to have. He gets where I’m coming from, my perspective better, given you know, given his experience. I think he does connect us a little better. [Nuwa]

Well I think that my advisor is a very good advisor. I really appreciate all her efforts with us. She is very supportive and even when she's very busy, but she always has time for us, so I think she's a very nice person. She's very careful with me and in general with all the team. [Olivia]

Expressions of personal concern were also gratifying to many students. "She's very good, she's not just in the professional part, she's also concerned about your personal stuff. I know my sister had some problems and she was like, how is your sister? I'm really very happy with her." [Olivia]

Simply feeling comfortable with their advisors has been listed as an important characteristic. Most students reported that they were encouraged to speak about difficulties that they may be having. Even students who were content in their studies were pleased to know they had an individual who was open to hearing them. "They say if I have any concern or problems, I can get help from them, though I don't think I have many problems with my life. I am pretty strong but I really appreciate they offer." [Huan]

You won't feel like panic when you talk to her. She really encourages us to talk in the group meetings. I didn't talk that much at the beginning, the first three times, and then she just asked me several questions, to make sure I understand everything. But I think I've been making progress nowadays because the last group meetings, I talked a lot. I felt like her encouragement really works. I'm never afraid of saying something in front of her, either on research, or regular talking. She has a sense of humor. She is very approachable. [Luli]

I appreciate that he tries, I think, to relate to me because there was a time that it was right after [a natural disaster at home], and we were talking about work and school. And then halfway through the conversation he suddenly changes the subject and he goes, “So how’s your family doing? I heard about the [disaster].” He goes, “Is everyone ok?” And I’m like, “Yeah, but thanks for asking.” And he goes, “Oh that’s good, that’s good. Let’s go back to work.” [Selena]

He was supportive of me in terms of understanding my needs, that sometimes I need extra help, and he is there to help me when I actually reach out to him so I do feel that he – but he doesn’t make me as a special case – he does treat me kind of the same expectations he would have with other students, so that is why I say to some extent. [Nuwa]

Clear expectations and feedback

Most individuals appreciate knowing how they will be assessed, and then receiving timely feedback. Even if the encounter was initially a difficult one, time spent with their advisors was generally considered time well-spent. “I think he has different, good characteristics that I expect from an advisor. He gives me the guidelines for what I need to do or have to follow. This is a good trait for me.”[Hamid]

It helps me a lot if I can manage what he expects of me in a deadline and at the same time plan around it everything else—my coursework, my family life, my social life, so that really helps that he gives deadlines and he’s very clear of what he expects of me. . . For me it’s like, “Where are your notes, do you

reflect after we meet?” . . . He’s so structured, he’s so organized. But I really like that about him because he keeps me on my toes that I can’t really slip anything by him. I can’t do that. [Selena]

Every time I stepped into my advisor’s office, I think I’d be a little nervous. I had something I needed to get done and I wasn’t sure about it, and I needed feedback. But I always left his office feeling extremely comfortable and with a plan. [Dawud]

Friendliness

Particularly for students whose advisors were relatively young, students were frequently allowed to be on a first-name basis with their advisors. Most students were surprised and then pleased to find their relationship to be informal and accessible. Their advisors served as cultural gatekeepers to the U.S., trustworthy bridges who would explain cultural questions as well as academic ones.

We have a kind of informal relationship. I mean I remember in the first months he once told me, “I usually don’t have formal relationships with students.” And this was very good because I could ask different questions or topics I need to know from him besides my formal work or research. [Hamid]

Hamid talked about how concerned he had been when he had to attend a western, Christian funeral. His advisor was his first contact for information about etiquette and what to expect.

Students have also embraced the social activities and recreational opportunities which their advisors have invited them to. “We get along, sometimes they will invite us to dinner, to their house, to their home, and you know, [professor]

is a builder of a boat for two years. He launched it in [local lake], and last week, we went to the lake to see the launch, and I was also in the boat.” [Huan] Thanksgiving, picnics, and family barbeques have all been listed as common opportunities which students have appreciated.

Actually she offers help for not just academic matters but I’ve found I haven’t needed it yet. She is very kind. Last Thanksgiving she invited me to her house and I spent lunch together with her family, so I think she tries to build a good relationship with me. Maybe that’s different culture, but in my home country the relationship between the teacher and students is a little bit far [distant]. But here I feel that she doesn’t consider me that far [distant].

[Aninda]

Several students appreciated having someone inquire about their lives, being able to share their own culture, and simply having their names pronounced correctly. “My advisor is interested in knowing about people of my country. Two weeks ago I and the other girl in the program, we are both from [the same country] so we invited our American advisor to a [traditional] lunch and I think that makes the relationship easier.” [Elaheh]

Although not all students expect close relationships with their advisors, sometimes too much focus on business is stressful.

I don’t want to cry either in front of him because that would be awkward. But he’s not like, for example, I appreciated [another professor] sometimes even though she’s not my advisor. She asks about my family back home, or she

asks about [my country], things like that that make them a bit more human.

You can relate to them, he doesn't do that at all. [Selena]

A student commented on the lack of diversity. Although she believed her department was academically strong, she missed the range of voices.

I think in terms of the professors it is a man's world and that's the reality of it, we can't deny it. We only have male professors so they can't be. And that's where I think Curt is a big plus because he has this personal focus that's not necessarily along with its man's world. At least that's what I've seen. I could be wrong, I don't know. But I do like it that there's diversity around in their thoughts. It's not necessarily in the representation but in their thoughts.

[Sophia]

Supportiveness of student research, interests, and life

Although students, particularly in STEM fields, frequently expect to work on research projects that their advisors or departments are associated with, they are always gratified when their own interests are given attention by their advisors. Being reminded that their work is important is a good way of staying on track. "When I'm working on my thesis and it's a really tough time, my advisors will ask about, "What's your idea, what are you really interested in, what are your passions about? They really offer help, and I feel really lucky. I feel like I am blessed by God, I have so good advisors." [Huan]

Another thing I think is really good about my advisor, is she really respects my own research interests. Respects my own choices, so she doesn't really force projects on me, but I can always initiate something, and let her know,

here is what I'm going to do, and usually she really respects that. So I'm really a proactive person, I guess, because I like initiating stuff, and being responsible for that. [Meili]

Dawud, who was on an H-1B visa - which allowed him to work full-time - had to manage his studies around his work life. He appreciated his advisor's willingness "To allow me to become independent in my schedule. Working full time is a huge part of my life and trying to get the degree. Having your advisor be understanding of that is huge for me."

Hamed brought his wife and son to the U.S. with him. He reflected on other, less fortunate students.

I am usually working during weekends but one thing that I like about my advisor is that if we have a meeting on Friday he generally doesn't expect that I to prepare something on Monday. The feeling that you are free and have time for yourself for your family during weekend like other people is very good.

Hamed went on to note that he had several friends who seemed to work nearly continually. In contrast, he believed he was treated with a high degree of consideration.

Yohannes, an African student, experienced the death of his brother early in his program. Because he had escaped his country and was in the U.S. as a refugee, there was no opportunity for him to go home even if his schedule would have allowed it. "For me, I never thought I would have to go to a grief counselor." He was touched by his advisor's concern, and he went.

That was, “I’m ok, I can go to a church,” and that is all, and I have to talk to myself, find a quiet place by myself, and that’s all, and he said, “Please, Yohannes, for me, go to a grief counselor.”

Yohannes commented that going to the counselor was very helpful to him, because he was so far from his own family, culture, and customs. “She just created an environment to express my emotions.”

You know back home, when you have grief, you get together, there are people together, and you express yourself. And you just let it go. Here the problem is you are by yourself. Sunday, people are with me, Monday I am alone. Everybody goes to work. I keep that with me, “Please do it for me.”

Elaheh reported that her advisor purposefully made certain that she was included in all the activities associated with their department and college. She observed that he was frequently the only faculty member in attendance at some college activities, and he was highly accessible.

I believe my advisor has this leadership character. I really feel the support from him because maybe he’s not always there in his office whenever I want to ask a question, but I never felt that I don’t have enough support from him. He’s always inviting me and another graduate student who is working with him to all the meetings and gatherings and everything. [Elaheh]

Liko’s advisor frequently brings her students together for meetings which impact everyone’s research. The students help one another in these meetings.

She calls it brainstorming; she likes that. Because my research is kind of hard –actually all research is hard – the previous studies in my field were

previously done in more controlled environments, but my research was done in the field. That means a lot more work compared with other studies, so we discuss a lot, like what method should we use, should we collect more data, or do more simulations. These kinds of things we should discuss a lot. I think for that part, she helps a lot. I think she helps to see if there are any good ideas we should discuss and she wants to motivate her students, and let her students find their own motivation. [Liko]

Responsiveness/accessibility

The single most valued trait among the students was accessibility. Regular meetings that were focused on the student's research and academics ranged in frequency from weekly to monthly. Often these meetings were used to set goals, but they were as often used to check in.

We meet formally probably about once a month, mostly because he wants progress on what he's asked for, and also a new agenda. We have a goal every time we meet that this is what we're going to talk about and for example, he wants me to prepare for a conference a year or six months down the road. We rarely meet about class matters; it's always about what he expects of me as an advisee. [Selena]

He has an open door policy that means you can go ahead and talk to him, interrupt him at any time. In a special case, in a group meeting, he will say, "guys, these next three days, don't have any fires in the lab," he has those days. But mostly he is open. I really like that also, and that I can have a communication with him any time that I want. [Yohannes]

Yes, we schedule our meetings and we meet once every two weeks. I think that is very important—and if you need something you can make an appointment with her, she's always open. Sometimes her office is closed so sometimes when the door is open I go in. [Olivia]

Mehrana, from a Middle Eastern country, was academically lonely. Her coursework was interdisciplinary. She had funding and offices in two different departments, on two different campuses. One advisor was American and the other was from India. She noted that the American advisor was more concerned and observant of her well-being than was the Indian advisor, but she was not certain whether that concern was based upon her being the only international student in the American advisor's department. For the Indian professor, most of his students were international. When asked whether she believed department culture also played a role, she immediately said that departmental culture was probably relevant because of the nature of the different types of research being conducted. It was her opinion that both advisors were quite supportive, but one maintained more distance.

Open-door policies and responsiveness to emails was always appreciated. Aninda was quite impressed by her advisor's prompt replies.

Anytime I need help I can contact her and she will respond immediately so I think the good things about her is that she will respond to my email immediately. Even when I send it at night she will respond directly. [Aninda]

Another student commented, "He's very understanding, actually. And when I have some problem, I just discuss with him, any time. He is always sitting there, and opens his door. He gives me some suggestions in my life, or in my career." [Yun]

Dawud, who described his relationship with his advisor as “personally distant,” he also felt his advisor was thoroughly professional.

Whenever I needed him he was there. There was not a time—he made time for me on vacation. He’d Skype in from a cabin in the woods when he would go fishing, and answer questions. Even throughout graduate school, whether it was for my Master’s or working on my Ph.D., every time I’d send him an e-mail I knew I’d be getting an answer back shortly. He was very communicative, very responsive, very responsible, and he allowed me to be independent. And I needed my independence. I think maybe some people need someone to tell them each week what to do. And for me it was that I need some space. [Dawud]

Liko, a Chinese student nearing the end of his program, talked about how discouraging a long program can seem. His advisor showed him attention and concern, and he was very appreciative.

Sometimes I could be very depressed, not that motivated to research. During that type of period she tried to help me several times. During that time, she invited me for lunch, to talk a little bit, to see if she can help, just to make sure I am confident and mentally healthy. [Liko]

Academically, she is helping me do all the research interests that I want to do, and because we all share the same cultural background, sometimes we share the same festivals together, we like share, dinner each semester, things like that. Academically, all we come here, we adopt the academic culture of America, but for like, personal life, social life, it’s the same background and

culture. We are near to each other, actually we can speak our mother tongue the same. So I think that helps. [Jun]

Feng was a first-year student who was appreciative of his advisor's ability to adapt to his individual qualities.

He gives me a lot of time, my time for me to practice. He's not so pushy. I think that students this age, they should be responsible for their own things, rather than be pushed by other people. I think it's good sometimes he will give suggestions. For example, when I use my computer and the system is in Chinese. He says, "You had better change it to English." [Feng]

Mentoring

The academic mentoring relationship as described in Jaeger (2011), Rose (2005), Sedlacek et al. (2007), and Schlosser et al. (2011a) proved to be a more complex topic than expected. A mentoring relationship is intentional, mutual, and personal. When asked about mentoring, for the Chinese doctoral students interviewed, the definition of a mentor did not carry the same cultural or linguistic meaning as for the non-Chinese students. Only two Chinese students embraced the word as understood in American English. When students asked me to define the word, I responded that I was interested in their understanding of it.

Chinese students and mentoring

The Chinese students' interpretation of the word "mentoring" or "mentor" appeared to carry other cultural meanings within Chinese languages and cultures.

Actually in China, especially now, we don't say mentor, we don't talk about mentor, a lot like before, which is why I may not consider it. But actually,

when I think about it, my connection with my advisor over the past four years, I could pick up several times she intends to help me, besides academic.”

[Liko]

Luli commented, “Well the monitoring relationship is like if your advisor is willing to help you figure out your research problem, or maybe your course problem, or something like that.” Finally, Yun said, “For me I think a mentor is a teacher who teaches your class. An advisor is, your Master’s advisor, your Ph.D. advisor, they are part of the whole study process.”

Non-Chinese students and mentoring

Other students embraced the idea of mentoring as it is commonly understood in the United States. Twenty-five students identified their advisors as mentors or role models who influenced how they regarded their discipline, their teaching, and how they thought about their academic careers. Not all students wanted or expected a mentoring relationship. One student neither wanted nor particularly expected a mentor.

I can say not specifically, but sometimes I feel my advisor is my mentor, but not most of the time. I mean, it hardly happens for me. I personally had just one person during my college time that I know as a mentor, so maybe because of my—for me it’s very hard to find a person that I can follow his or her instructions and accept as a mentor. [Hamid]

Similarly, the advisor was not always the student’s primary mentor. Gabriela, a South American student, found herself in a different college because she needed to

follow funding for her doctoral studies. She turned to her Master's advisor, who was more familiar with both her topic and her research skills.

Selena, an Asian student, did not believe that her advisor was particularly good at dealing with women, "He tries," but another faculty member had made a point of checking on her. This attention caused her to think of the other professor as a mentor.

I really appreciate the attention she gives me even though I don't look for it. She just knows the right time to ask about me and what I need, and she always looks out for opportunities that not even—like the conference, I was like, "Why me? Why do you want me to go?" It happened to have an impact too, because I started to become aware of the scholarships they have depending on the kind of research you want to do. They're available to international students and non-U.S. citizenship holders. And also it made me think about the kind of challenges women still face in this modern day and age. [Selena]

Similarly, Dawud, from a Middle Eastern country, said that one of his

committee members had been a great influence. "He's been my greatest support."

He's helped me develop my scientific writing; he's helped me be a better researcher, better thinker, a better designer of research, and to think about details in a way that's been completely different, and I think he's had the most impact on my graduate life. [Dawud]

Help comes from many people, including graduate students. One advisor quickly connected her Central American student to other graduate students in her department. She assigned the more experienced students to assist Olivia when she

arrived in the U.S., providing her a temporary place to stay, transportation, and help opening a bank account, obtaining a drivers' license, and navigating the university bureaucracy.

I have received a lot of help from different parts. My advisor has helped me a lot. The American girls [in my department], they helped me very much at the beginning. When I needed help I used to call Jen and tell her, "I need my driver's license, please take me to the office." When I started here I started in a mentorship program and they assigned me a mentor and he's a Ph.D. student in his fourth year. So I have met him two or three times in a year and he told me some things about the program. They are very helpful, but not very frequently because I think he's busy and I'm busy too. In general I think I have received a lot of help. If I need something, I have different people.

[Olivia]

Dawud did not believe he had a particularly close relationship with his advisor, "We won't be going to lunch anytime soon," and yet he still believed that his advisor was a good model for him to follow.

He is very professional, the support I needed to get for my degree, and he's done a lot of things. For example, he's a great person to be able to brainstorm ideas with. He was there to help me to revise my writing, he was there to help me revise my coursework, and he was there to talk about future goals and plans, where I was going to see myself in five years, and forced me to think about the big picture. He was really good for that. Working with him over the years, seeing what he does and kind of observing a little bit his work ethic,

his professionalism, the way he treats his students, the way he wants his students to succeed, has helped me on a personal note to kind of see—I've told him this before – “I'd like to be the type of advisor that you are.” And learn—you know, at the beginning I realized he wasn't really asking about me and then I realized he wants you to be proactive, and he taught me that's an important skill to have. I have a focus for research, a future focus, and I think at least for the next few years there is a direction, if you will, an identity, that I'd like to take on as a researcher, as a faculty member. Professionally if I email him and ask him something he's going to be right there. Without him I don't think I would have graduated the way that I did. It was a very well written dissertation. [Dawud]

Dr. ___ actually was really instrumental in me building up some courage. He's retired now because at the time [advisor] was not around. I had a class with [advisor] when that happened but he wasn't available for me so it was Dr. ___. I was new here and didn't know the other professors. Dr. ___, I had spoken to on the phone when I was [home] so he was the one I gravitated to, not [advisor]. [Sophia]

Individual Stories

Sophia, a South American student, reported that her advisor had caused her to change the way she thought about her profession.

Coming in without the background there were many times where I didn't know what I was supposed to be looking for. Or what opportunities could have been that I think he's opened doors for me in that way. He's led me

towards looking or researching into certain things. Sometimes overtly and I think sometimes covertly. If I look back at it I do think he knew and probably realized with my personality he could make a bigger impact by not telling me that he's making an impact, if you know what I mean. I think he's smart enough to realize that with this individual, whereas with somebody else it might be a different strategy. So he's given me opportunities in different ways. I've gotten opportunities to see and interact in different ways that he's made my learning environment richer. It's all a butterfly effect. [Sophia]

Three students reported they had several mentors, whose roles have helped and influenced their academic careers while in the United States. These students followed varied paths, but they managed to develop relationships prior to admission to the Midwestern research institution. These relationships greatly helped them to be admitted, funded, and successful.

Two Important Mentors

Lian, a Chinese female student. Lian had profound and life-changing mentoring experiences. “Actually I never planned to become a graduate student, because in China everything was OK for me.” However, she wanted a chance to travel, and she was eventually offered a job in the United States. Her employer became her first mentor. The employer encouraged her to apply for a Master's program, wrote a recommendation letter, and helped her to schedule time off work to work on her studies. Lian remarked that she had a fairly low undergraduate grade point average because she had not been a very committed student. Her standard of living and work life at home had been sufficiently rewarding for her.

In applying to her Master's program, Lian had to struggle with getting a sufficiently high TOEFL score. Her mentor pushed her to retake the test, and intervened further when representatives of the university did not believe her scores were sufficient.

[Mentor] said, "Maybe you are not an excellent student. But you are an excellent teacher." And then she said, "Go for it." And later I know someone tried to review my documents, and they talked to [her] about my score. They were worried about whether I could finish this program too, because my English was so poor, and she just said a lot of nice things about me, and then I went to the Master's program. The funny thing is when I finished my job I finished the Master's program? And I said, "Hey, I want to do a doctoral program." And she said, "Go for it, I will write an admission letter for you too." She changed my life. My whole life, my personal view of my life. And I think she's, the person, the angel who found me first, she opened the door, and I am just lucky, I am blessed. For my doctoral degree, I was hesitant. After graduating from the Master's program, I was thinking to come back to China, and thinking to never come back. Because my parents are there, I want to take care of them, but later when I went back, I experienced something, unfairness.

Lian's job search back home was not a smooth process. Despite excellent credentials, good language skills, and her international experience, she found it difficult to be hired without paying a bribe.

I passed several interviews, actually a lot of interviews. Colleges, and high schools, and I found my teaching experience was excellent. People told me that because I didn't do something, like other interviewees - they may donate something really precious - but I didn't, so compared to them, I may be rejected. So that time, I thought, OK, I think it's time to leave. Actually, by that time I already applied to the doctoral program.

Lian emailed her advisor and asked if she could come back to [university] for the doctoral program. She had been working on her thesis while in China, and she pulled the data together for her research. Lian reported that her advisor said, "Come back soon."

With her advisor's assistance at [institution], Lian had a new I-20 form in less than two weeks. Because she arrived back at the university late, she was only able to concentrate on completing her thesis. Lian's advisor helped her secure an assistantship, and later, an additional scholarship. Lian recalled the frustration she had felt when she was home. She spoke of the way her advisor's reference letter had made her feel during her Chinese job search.

I reserved the right to read her recommendation letter. I printed that letter out and kept in my purse always with me when I was in China. Those four months, be honest, I read her letter every day. She said that I am a unique person, and amazing, that I can conquer a lot of things, and do whatever I want, and I can become the student of the doctoral program. I can make a contribution to this department. That is really, really high speaking of me.

When people reject me at home, I have somebody who thinks I am really valuable, here.

Lian described some of the challenges she has faced in her doctoral program. Teaching was an important concern for her, particularly because she felt insecure about her English skills. Teaching assistants frequently find themselves teaching subjects which they have never studied themselves. Learning a subject while simultaneously teaching it can be difficult and frustrating, and she was depressed during this time. Lian met with her advisor several times, and her advisor was able to offer her insight and guidance.

Lian believes her teaching and command of the subject improved by the next semester. She felt grateful for all the supportive people she has encountered during her academic career. "I never think I am an excellent person, but because those excellent persons support me, I became so lucky, to get a lot of things."

Nuwa, a Chinese female student. Nuwa thought highly of her advisor, but her assistantship also broadened her horizons. Nuwa's supervisor was not associated with her academic research, but that supervisor gave her a great deal of authority and autonomy that allowed Nuwa to see herself in a different way.

So the second year I started working for a grant. So I started having a boss, not my advisor, kind of like having a research supervisor. She's the same, super smart, and she's the one I think has impacted me a lot. I would talk to her, and tell her, what are the expectations for the grant? So she involved me in a lot of different tasks, and also I kind of found myself being useful for that project. I started taking a stats course, in my department, and for that grant

what I did was I did a clinic management and analysis, and they really thought I was a valuable member for their project. My boss and I met regularly, and I think she trusts me a lot, and gives me a lot of tasks, and I do like that. I feel like I started growing quite quickly, and that's how I feel. This is my fourth year, actually, that I worked for her. That was a turning point for me, working on a grant and having another mentor.

Although she believed her advisor was a good choice, and that they are a good and compatible fit, Nuwa's additional mentor has been as important to her development as a student and as a researcher. Each served her in different roles.

It's not because my advisor is not good, it's just because I wasn't really actively involved in her projects. She is holder of the grant. She doesn't coordinate anything. My boss is a research coordinator, and at the same time she is really smart and she knows the field really well and she is really productive. They mentor different things for me. That grant isn't necessarily in my field. What I do for them is data analysis, data management, writing reports, and writing manuscripts. My advisor has been really helpful mentoring my own line of research. She knows so much, and she has been in that field for many years. And also, I can talk about my progress in my department with my advisor; I couldn't talk about that with my boss. So I feel like they mentor different parts of my profession.

Nuwa went on to mention an opportunity she had to open doors for her advisor. When Nuwa went home to China for a semester to work on research, her advisor arranged to visit her. In turn, Nuwa arranged for her advisor to lecture at

some universities, and Nuwa served as her advisor's interpreter. Nuwa believed that this experience enhanced her personal knowledge, and also enhanced the relationship she had with her advisor.

Four Mentors: Isabella. Isabella, a South American student, first came to the U.S. on a J-2 visa. Her husband had a scholarship from their country's government to work on his doctorate in an engineering field. Isabella spoke no English, but her visa permitted her to work. Despite having a Master's degree in a STEM field, Isabella took a job in a restaurant and enrolled in free English language classes that were offered by a volunteer organization. She found her job tedious, but until she learned English, she was not able to work on graduate studies. Isabella was also uncertain what she wanted to study.

She was eventually able to make contact with a co-national professor who was in her general area of studies. This was important to her in the early stages of her search because her English was poor.

We talked through emails, and he told me to just stop by his office and we can talk, and I was so excited about it. First thing, we talked in Spanish, and it was really a release, because I could explain myself and my situation, and he was very kind.

Isabella's difficulty was that the professor did not have funding to pay for a doctoral student, so he had to search for a scholarship on her behalf, and he also tried to find funding for projects. Isabella got her scholarship in 2013, but within a week her sponsor had been moved back to his original department. Her choice was then to either follow the professor, and go through the admission process for the new

department, or to remain in the department which accepted her, and to find a new advisor.

Isabella went to the department which admitted her and she found a new advisor.

I just went to his office and I said, 'This is happening to me, I'm so frustrated,' and he said to me, 'That's fine, I have a project for you.' And he's so kind. I love him. He's really, really, really kind.

Although her co-national professor is not on her committee, she is in contact with him because she founded an organization for students from her country at the University, and he sponsors that group. Isabella sees her relationship with her new advisor as very positive.

He is very open-minded. He lets me talk; he lets me be myself, like in research, and in academic work. That has been really nice because my former advisor, doing my Master's, was very authoritarian, he was very like, "You have to do this, and this," and I couldn't talk, and that made me really mad, because I need to talk, and discuss. I think that this advisor, the one I have now, his personality, his work, and the way that he thinks -he's very good in research. He teaches me, and he supports my work and he pushes me to do good things. I propose for this semester to enroll in a course in data analysis seminar, and he said, "Yes, yes sure." He's willing to do that and think not just for now, but for the future for me. So that's really nice, and yes, I like the way he thinks, and he pushes me.

Isabella has been involved in meetings for the project her advisor is involved in. She feels that she is an active member of the team, and that her educational credentials fit well into the group's work. She feels included and valuable.

He also invites me to their meeting groups. He said, 'You should be there because you are part of this project and you need to learn how researchers investigate; you need to learn how to communicate with the group.' This has also been really helpful to me.

Isabella reflected that she felt that she was learning more than her academic discipline. Her mentors have helped her to grow as a scientist and as a person. "They teach me the way that I could be as a researcher with their example, with their way to talk to me, the way they invite me." She believed that their influence has both permeated and changed her life. "That's not just academic fields or areas that are important to me but other things, things that are personal to me, things in life, they make me grow also in that area."

Conclusion

Students clearly experienced a range of positive advising and mentoring experiences. The students who have characterized their experiences as positive offered a great deal of nuance in describing their relationships. All of these students are adults who have had a wide range of experiences, yet their advisors and/or mentors have common traits. These traits are generally associated with professional educators and thoughtful leaders, such as inclusiveness, empathy, curiosity, and respect. The students have expressed awareness of these traits, have come to appreciate them, and appear to be inspired by them.

Chapter 5

Poor Advising Practices and Experiences

“All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (Tolstoy, trans. 1999, p. 3). Most of the doctoral students I interviewed at the [institution] reported satisfactory experiences. The students are all adults with the life experiences and expectations that come with maturity and reflection.

Students could often recall experiences in which they were dissatisfied or unhappy with some event or encounter, even as they noted the positive contributions that their academic advisor was able to bring to their lives and programs. Perhaps doctoral students expect they will experience difficulty. In any individualized relationship, each participant brings expectations and experiences. Not all expectations will be met in even the most satisfactory of circumstances and environments. Three themes emerged from interviews regarding negative advising experiences: absence or disengagement, lack of familiarity with the student’s research area, and a hostile work environment.

Advisor is Absent/Disengaged

Of the 34 students interviewed, four reported their advisor had experienced some time on sabbatical while they were in their doctoral program. All students in this category lost their advisor for only one semester, instead of a possible two semesters. For Meili, whose advisor left on sabbatical in her second semester of her doctoral studies, this was regarded as a particularly difficult time because Meili was balancing coursework and a research assistantship which she regarded as irrelevant to

her program of studies. She was left to find her role in the department without guidance.

I was really frustrated the first year, and part of the second, actually, because the first year I was TA for a class, but it wasn't my advisor's class. And then the second semester my advisor was on sabbatical, so I didn't know really what to do. No one was there, and I tried working in a lab, but that wasn't really my research interest, and I felt like I was an outsider. I didn't feel I belonged to that lab so it was really frustrating that whole semester. At the end I had to email the director of that lab and say, "I'm sorry; I won't come to that lab meeting anymore." I was planning to do that project in his lab, and then I realized I couldn't get any support there, so I decided to switch. I had to write an email. I couldn't just quit and walk away. I had to write an email to him, and just tell him I decided to switch my project. I couldn't say, "I didn't feel I belong here." So I just said something really diplomatic, but I also expressed my frustration, how I felt really, not confident in what I am doing, not competent as a grad student. Of course, he showed sympathy, for that, so the first year it was hard. I didn't blame the environment too much, but more myself. I just felt I'm not content enough, I should have done more, I should have worked harder, so not enough, blaming myself. [Meili]

Meili commented that she believed that much of her first year had been an unproductive waste of time.

Faculty members earn sabbaticals or professional leave, but for the graduate student who must be advised from a distance, having an advisor who is physically

absent can be a difficult experience. For international students, the absence of an advisor early in their program is troubling because their primary link to the program is also absent. Students lack direction.

Abbas, a Middle Eastern student, felt that he missed having regular contact with his advisor, and that her absence was a hardship. “She is good person, most of the times available, except the times when she was on sabbatical leave, and one time one semester when she was in [another country]. And she’s hard to get in summers.” Abbas had another advisor as well. He commented that the key problem with the second advisor was getting a response to his emails. “When she responds, she is good. But it takes time sometimes.”

Gabriela had to change programs to retain funding, not only switching departments but colleges. Her present advisor is frequently absent. “He travels to India for some reason so many times a year. The first time we didn’t see him for three months or so. And that happens quite often.” Gabriela observed that the lengthy absences primarily complicated access to resources. Because her advisor had control of how money was spent, funding for needed lab equipment or other resources was often delayed.

Selena was confused by a perceived emotional disconnect, which surprised her a great deal. “For the most part professionally, he’s been really great. Personally though, because I’m a girl and because I’m an international student, I’m not sure he knows exactly how to talk to girls.”

She also expressed concern about her advisor’s lack of knowledge about the specific requirements associated with her status as an international student. Selena

had the responsibility for explaining the specific requirements of her status to her advisor. She appreciated her advisor's flexibility, once he understood the issues and legal considerations of her situation.

So in that sense he's been very helpful, but he's a bit clueless also about the kind of pressures we have compared to non-international students. He said to me just before the summer, "Try not to take any classes in the summer because I want you to focus on your research writing," and I'm like, "I can't do that because this is my contract. It's different for international students." And he goes, "Really now? I didn't know that." So even in the semester he was like, "Can you only take two courses?" And I'm like, "No, because the minimum is nine for international students; nine credit hours." And he goes, "Well there goes my knowledge about international students." [Selena]

The absence of Meili's advisor through sabbatical was part of a greater difficulty. Her advisor was well known in her field. She seemed disinterested in publishing and advancing research, which Meili found frustrating. "It's not like some junior professors who need publications so badly and they always involve graduate students to write with them."

The first three years, my advisor and I didn't have any publications, because she doesn't write a lot of empirical research articles anymore. Then finally a year ago, she offered to write a chapter with me. So I said, sure, so we coauthored a chapter. I started analyzing my dissertation data in the spring, so I told my advisor, "I will write the manuscript first, because I need publications to find a job." But my advisor said, "Ok, will that be too much?"

Writing your dissertation and manuscripts at the same time?” But I am the kind of person who does things, and then present them and you tell me how they look. In the summer, early summer, I just took a week, and wrote a manuscript and just finished it. And I sent it to my advisor, asked for suggestion. That’s like my first empirical publication with my advisor, and it got published. And then, I just followed the same pattern, and wrote another manuscript based on my dissertation and sent it to her. That’s the style I think she is comfortable with, and she doesn’t have the pressure of writing. But I do. So I think the best way for me is to just write on my own, and just send it to her for suggestions and review. So publication wise, I feel, I didn’t have as many as some people whose advisors are younger and have more pressure, but I think at the same time I have to show initiative. Publication-wise, I hoped we would have more publications together, but everyone’s advisor is at a different stage of their life, so I couldn’t force that on her. And it’s the same; I was telling my friend the other day. The first two years I didn’t go to any conference, because I didn’t have anything to present. My advisor didn’t really push me to go to conferences, and I was really stressed out about that because my friends constantly told me, I’m going to a conference, I’m going to a conference. So my first conference was after the second year of graduate school. So the first two years I really didn’t have much but from the third year things just became easy. [Meili]

Advisor Doesn't Know the Student's Research

Although the nature of doctoral studies requires original research and the development of one's own area of expertise, three students reported their advisors were very distant from the students' fields of study. For two of the students, they were the only students in their area, an interdisciplinary program. They each had advisors in two colleges, and one had committee members in a third college. Far-flung interests caused the students to believe that they were leading themselves through their programs, rather than being advised and assisted. They confessed that they would probably have been better suited to a different institution, and neither held their advisors responsible for their lack of knowledge, although they were frustrated and disappointed.

Gabriela, whose advisor is frequently absent, has come to regard his absences as mostly positive.

The problem is mostly related to the fact that he's not very familiar with the research and stuff I have to do daily. He's a [discipline] and I'm [different discipline] so he was the one who got the funding for this project. But he doesn't have the technical skills to do it or the understanding, which is kind of unusual. In grad school we usually have an advisor who has at least some idea and is able to advise you in the process. So we've had some conflicts because of that, because we don't speak the same language in terms of research. When I have questions I cannot go and ask him, so when there are delays in the process or whatever, it's kind of hard for him to understand.

Both of us try to do our best. He's trying to learn about [her discipline] and I'm trying to find ways to explain to him what we do.

His absences have become productive times for Gabriela, because they allow her to work without interference or lengthy meetings.

It depends, but to be honest for me it's (his absence) a good thing because I don't know, he doesn't like provide any significant input to my research so I'd rather just get it done myself instead of having to meet with him. Every week I plan for that meeting and take my time. Meetings with him usually take an hour or two hours and I have to prepare and stuff. The fact that he doesn't understand very well what I do makes me have to dedicate more time to prepare my presentations and stuff because I have to put it in a language that he can be familiar with. For me it's better when he's not around. But sometimes it's good when I need like to buy equipment or materials. He's very protective of the money, I mean of course, so if he's not here we don't have a signature and that's a problem. So again, more delays with the project because he's travelling for three months.

Gabriela has appreciated and recognized his efforts to understand her field as well-meaning exercises, but she also recognized that there were areas in which she had greater knowledge.

He doesn't understand what I do. He feels like he's the main advisor of course, and he likes to try to advise me when I have a problem. But since he's not familiar with the area, he asked me to do experiments that were unnecessary. Even though I tell him I don't think that's going to work, why

don't we do it this way, he's like no we're going to do it my way. But I have to do it and then I waste our time.

Gabriela appreciated her advisor's interest in maintaining funding for the project which they are working on, and she appreciated his personality. However, their scientific differences and approaches to research has complicated their relationship. On the other hand, she found positive qualities as well, particularly in contrast to witnessing other student-advisor relationships. He is relatively even-tempered, unlike other student-advisor relationships that she has observed. Gabriela has also observed that her advisor was good at writing, which was something he could assist her with. His primary role for Gabriela was to maintain the secure funding stream that made her research possible.

I mean with him it's like, we never yell at each other or anything like that. I have seen advisors who have done that here. Like they swear at each other. I don't get to that point. He's a polite person, he never yells. It's just frustrating because when he says something you have to do it even though it's beyond the logic to you as a professional. The fact that he cannot help me when I have questions so there are points where I don't know where to go. He tells me just figure it out.

Hamid attempted to clarify his situation, because his research interests were specific, and he had a difficult experience trying to convey his research interests to his advisor.

The main problem I had was defining my research project because [topic] is not the expertise of my advisor. It's a kind of broad area. So kind of

persuading my advisor for letting me work in this area, and proving that it's a good expertise for me if I follow that for my dissertation was difficult.

Because when you know much about one thing it's very hard and it can be innovative or top priority for you to follow.

Hostile Work Environment

Two students reported hostile work environments, one due to a personal matter. Dawud, a Middle Eastern student, experienced a personal difficulty that affected relationships with many people in his department. "At least two faculty members up until today, years later, will not talk to me. And if they see me they just kind of shrug and leave."

And that affected a few things because I was already in the process of developing a proposal and then my relationship with him [advisor] ended. It wasn't really a nice ending; it was just an email that went out to everybody saying Dawud needs to find a new mentor. [Dawud]

Dawud added that until he found a new work position, he used a different entrance to the building so he would not unnecessarily encounter some individuals.

Jia's hostile work environment experience began with her advisor's resignation.

Advisor Who Resigns

Jia described a particularly difficult experience. She lost her first advisor because he decided to relocate, and he moved to another institution in another state. Jia's original advisor selected a new advisor for her. She discovered later that her first advisor had expressed his dissatisfaction with her to others, but he had not shared

his dissatisfaction with her. Jia's relationship with her second advisor was not straightforward, and she reported that she found their relationship to be tenuous and confusing.

At some point in their relationship, there was a misunderstanding which caused Jia's second advisor to send out a committee-wide email. In the email, he impugned Jia's ability, honesty, and academic integrity. Jia had retained all her earlier correspondence with her second advisor. She was successfully able to make her case to her committee. Jia is now completing her degree with her third advisor. She estimated that the incidences have delayed her graduation by at least one semester.

Jia's Story. Jia was in the process of completing her proposal. Her husband was also a doctoral student in another college at the institution. They had a young child, who was born in the U.S.

I have had three advisors so it's a very atypical case. My first advisor—all of them are white males. My first advisor left last year, I think for a new job in another city. That's why I switched to a new advisor. Then there's something unexpected that happened and I switched to my current advisor.

In the beginning, Jia believed that she had a quite positive relationship with her advisor.

I had a long history with my first advisor because he had been my advisor for four and a half years. He was very nice to me at the beginning and our relationship had been great until the point when he resigned from my committee. My understanding is, he knew I was an international student and I

came here all by myself, and I would need his support and care, so he treated me that way. And I was very grateful so I did everything I can to return such favors. I worked really hard and he said I was smart so he was happy he had me as his advisee, and also I was his first doctoral student because he came here in 2008, one year before I came here. So we simply view each other as unique.

Jia observed at some point that there was a change in her relationship with her advisor which she could not account for. Her advisor also made plans to leave the institution.

He was very good at motivating people and would talk about all the good things about me. He tried his best to make sure I was fully funded throughout my program and I was not sure when such a great and positive relationship changed. I didn't mean to change anything on my approach to my academic work or my approach to supporting him. But it seems that he was not totally satisfied with me, maybe starting from two years ago but I was not sure why. That's what he told me later on. He didn't complain to me about myself, and as far as I knew he didn't complain to anyone else about me, but actually he did. I had no idea about that. So my perception of the relationship was still the same emotionally, but in some aspect I was unsatisfied with him as well. He never followed things through and when he asked me to turn in something to him he didn't give me feedback, so I didn't know how to proceed. He was actually very busy, he was advising a lot of students, but as long as he assigned me anything to do I would always turn it in on time. That's my work

style. But maybe he wanted to finish something independently, but I was not sure what that was. He was not explicit on that. That was the hardest part in our relationship. That's why I became unsatisfied about his advising, but I didn't complain to anyone about him until the very last, so no one knew that our relationship had changed.

When Jia's advisor decided to leave, he had initially planned to continue their relationship. This arrangement was not permitted by the institution. He then selected an advisor for her. At this point in their relationship, Jia had begun to feel concern over her advisor's job change because she believed that she needed a more accessible advisor.

Last November he told me he got a job offer from another university and he was leaving, but it sounded to me that I was very special for him so he wanted to stay on my committee and keep advising me. But the grad studies didn't like that. I don't know how he did this but it sounded to me like he persuaded the graduate studies that he could be the coadvisor officially on the paperwork, but he would still take the major advisor's role after he left. To be honest, I didn't want him to stay on my committee because I knew him well. I knew his work style. I knew he'd be adjusting to a new job and a new life and it's going to be very hard for him to commit to my dissertation work. But I didn't say anything to object because I didn't want to hurt his feelings. So he had another advisor, actually my second advisor, be my major advisor on the paperwork, but the initial assumption among the three of us is he is going to keep being the major advisor. The official major advisor is just the secondary

advisor. That's the arrangement. During that time when he was resigning and relocating to another city, I was developing an idea about a dissertation topic, writing up the first draft of my proposal, and I was meeting with my second advisor regularly. So my plan was to propose right before spring break. I told him that in an email after he went to a different city. So then I told him -- he never gave me any negative feedback on my progress on the proposal -- but after I finished sending him all three chapters, he said it's not ready to be defended. So he didn't think I should propose. It's actually only two weeks before the proposing date.

Jia was extremely concerned about her original advisor and about his commitment to her work. She was not certain that he had read her proposal. She believed that he had begun to dislike her. They had a contentious email correspondence.

A lot of his comments didn't make sense to me. It sounded like he didn't read Chapter Two, and only read Chapter One. At least from his comments that's what I got. So I asked him very politely of course, did you read Chapter Two and I explained why I didn't cite certain things. He was seriously offended by my email and he replied really emotionally to my email. He said he was disappointed by my reactions to his feedback and he wanted to resign from my committee. And he said if he didn't resign at that time he would cast a dissenting vote on my proposal. He also said he had forwarded his decision to my official advisor. So my take was it has been finalized and he made up his mind. So I only said something like, thank you for being honest with me,

thank you for everything you've done for me, and I've understood you've forwarded your decision to Dr. ____ so, that's it. So I didn't beg him to stay but maybe he expected me to do so. To be honest, I didn't think keeping him in my committee was going to do any good for my dissertation.

She was concerned that her first advisor seemed to lack commitment to her, and that he seemed to be placing obstacles in her way. Jia was upset that he contacted her new advisor without fully explaining his position to her. She described a contentious email exchange.

I tried to be professional and unemotional. We had a long history and I was very loyal to him. I never complained about him to anyone no matter how unsatisfied I was. I was misguided. Then my second advisor thought we should convince him to stay on my committee but that's what I was unwilling to do. So I complained to my second advisor why I didn't want this person to stay on my committee and he made up his mind and resigned. The only thing to do is let it go. I had five people on my committee, so even without him I still have four. That's enough, so I don't have to include an additional committee member. My second advisor was not very comfortable about that, but still after consulting with [another] professor who knows me well and knows my first advisor well, he decided to let my advisor go. So after this point, my second advisor had to become a major advisor because he's the chair of the committee, and also my first advisor left me. Because I had been meeting with him regularly, what I thought I needed to do was just keep meeting with him as I had been doing, and then he read my proposal again

from the perspective of the major advisor. He said it was not ready to be defended and he wanted me to use the immediate data collection to do a pilot study. I understood that, I thought that was a reasonable decision. So I said I will do this. I'll wait and not propose in the spring, I will collect pilot data first and do what you asked me to do and propose in the fall. So that's what I did, and then I collected pilot data and analyzed the pilot data and spent the whole summer on the project. Initially the results were not very good but I had done what my second advisor asked me to do, for example provide the interrater reliability and to do some methodological revision, and I thought that was the point of the pilot study.

At this point, Jia and her second advisor had a professional disagreement, a confrontation about which she was concerned and confused.

But then he changed his mind. He thought that my pilot data should confirm my major hypothesis. And it didn't confirm my major hypothesis at the beginning. And then I thought about maybe there's subject by treatment interaction, so I did an analysis within a certain subgroup, and there was a strong subject by treatment interaction. And then I reported this progress to my second advisor, I think this was the end of July, and he was very encouraged by the results. He thought it was the convincing basis for my proposal. So I thought I could go ahead and propose after I finished revising. But at the beginning of the fall, he changed his mind again. He thought it's not a subject by treatment interaction. He thought because I defined the group in an ad hoc manner, he wanted me to do a third pilot study, and I was

disappointed, I was frustrated, but I didn't complain because I understood his rationale for it. I can accept that an advisor will change his mind.

Jia appreciated and understood his recommendations, and she revised her research as instructed.

After I agreed to do a third pilot study, because of the previous meeting, he pointed to me that the scoring rubric I used was too subjective and there was no justification from the literature, and that's a very reasonable feedback. So I went back to look at the literature to find something to improve my scoring rubric, to first make it more objective, second to make it supported by the existing literature. That was what I did to follow his advice. So in the process when we were talking about the third pilot study I actually did find an idea to make a better scoring rubric. I did that over the weekend before our Monday meeting. And I also started reanalyzing the data so I found a second rater over the weekend. The reason I wanted to do this is because I wanted to present to my advisor not just the new rubric, but also the evidence that the rubric is indeed better than the previous one, because the previous one had only acceptable interrater reliability, it's not high. And I had literature background to support why this is better than the previous one. So when we met he thought our committee should meet to help me design the third pilot study, to make sure the pilot study would confirm my major hypothesis, and I agreed to that. And then I showed him my notes on the second rubric and asked him whether I could do the reanalysis, and I also told him this time the interrater reliability is .8, but he didn't respond to this information. Maybe he didn't

pay attention to it. Then he asked me whether I wanted to reanalyze it, and I said yes. I also told him I had finished rescoring half of the sample.

This time, Jia went back and reanalyzed her data using the new metric she had found. She was able to confirm her hypothesis; however, her advisor did not trust her results.

I was very excited and I reported to him the new results, and he sounded that he didn't believe the results were true because he asked me, "This is an amazing transformation of the data pattern. I have never seen anything like this before, so when did you do the analysis and when did you find the second rater?" I did my best to explain every detailed procedure of my reanalysis to him and then he replied that, so when you ask me whether you could reanalyze the data, you had already started doing the reanalysis, is that correct? He thought I kept him in the dark—that's his words. I said no, that's not correct. I was offended by the way he interrogated me in the email so I said, "That's not correct. I told you about interrater reliability. You are my advisor, I respect you. There's no reason why I'd want to keep you in the dark. How would that serve me?" And I don't think he believed me. He never responded to explanation. And I said, "I told you about interrater reliability, I wanted to show you this figure to give you some evidence that this second rubric is indeed better than the first one, not just my speculation."

Jia was concerned that her advisor was not responding to her. She emailed him twice, but she did not receive a direct response to her concerns. Jia tried to express her recollections of their conversations, and she says that she offered to

explain her analysis and her new results. Instead, her advisor contacted her, saying that he wanted the committee to meet.

Jia believed that this was unusual, because the committee was not aware of the adjustments that had already been made to her research. The rubric had been improved and her hypothesis was confirmed. The response she received was less disappointing than terrifying to her. She had submitted a paper while he was travelling in the summer, and her advisor was angry, telling her that she had exceeded her authority.

I asked him how to prepare for this committee meeting and what is the purpose of the committee meeting. I said it's very important for me to understand because I was confused. And the next email is actually his last email in our communication, that one shocked me. And he said I did a lot of things dishonest up to that point so he would never trust me to be honest in my research or in my data. So he wanted to resign from my committee and before he takes any further action he wants the committee to meet to discuss my honesty issues. That's the purpose of the meeting. I just couldn't imagine why he would react in that way, why he would assume that I'm a dishonest person and interpret everything I did based on that assumption. He had three lines of evidence; the first is, late July I turned in the proposal and I put his name on it without asking his permission in advance. That was because I put together the proposal at the very last minute because he was travelling.

Jia acknowledged her responsibility for the lapse. At the time, Jia believed that her advisor seemed only initially angry, and then later he seemed less so. That the anger was still present several months later was unexpected and surprising to Jia.

I didn't ask him because he was travelling, so I told him like, about two days after I turned in the proposal and he objected to that so I took the proposal back immediately. By the time I took that back, the review had not started yet so it means no one has seen it so I thought that matter was resolved. And later on when I found the subject by treatment interaction and he responded very positively to it he said—he talked about the co-authorship issue again and he said he was willing to be my coauthor. So I thought given him saying that he should have given me...and I apologized to him both in the email and in person. I said I would take the blame and I would take back the proposal.

At the same time, Jia was nearing the end of her program and she was interested in her next step.

In late August I asked him whether I can start applying for academic jobs and he didn't object to that, and he always knew I wanted to apply for academic jobs this fall. I asked if he would look at my cover letter and give me feedback and he said yes. In September I emailed him my cover letter and he never gave me any feedback on that. He thought my cover letter misrepresented the status of my dissertation and that I was trying to deceive my readers. He thought I had apparently sent my letter to the position but I had not. I sent it to him to his feedback. If I sent the later what would be the

point of getting his feedback? He promised to give me feedback, he never gave me it and he used that as evidence to accuse me of being dishonest.

Finally, the advisor continued to express concern about Jia's new data. He wanted to hold a committee meeting because of three issues – her data and its analysis, her vitae and how she represented it, and the fact that she had submitted a paper with his name on it.

The third line is about the new data. He thought I kept him in the dark, which I didn't. He wanted the committee to talk about these things and I was really shocked. I would never expect any advisor to do anything like that to his students.

Finally, Jia's advisor said that he was concerned about her academic integrity. "He emailed the whole committee about my dishonesty and he wrote a four page memo that summarizes his evidence." Jia was frustrated and humiliated.

And that's only a small portion of what's happened between him and I. He also misrepresented and misinterpreted something. For example, he thought I had apparently sent the cover letter, which I hadn't.

Jia was becoming quite concerned about her career. A year after her first advisor left, she was in a conflict with her second advisor. She responded to her second advisor's email with her own. Jia had the foresight to retain their past correspondence, and she shared the document with her committee.

I wrote a 15-page memo which provides a complete view of my timeline and what happened between him and me. It includes dates and times and why I did certain things. I also told the committee that I never did anything

dishonest, that this is something serious and I have to defend myself and I said I have all kinds of physical evidence available, so that evidence is ready to be examined before the meeting. And I'm lucky I have advocates—two professors from my committee who believe I'm honest and who are willing to support me through this crisis.

Jia's second advisor contacted her first advisor, asking for evidence of past poor behavior and lapses in integrity.

After the committee received my memo, my second advisor actually contacted my first advisor from a different city. He said something like this: all is not well with Jia, you are excused from the meeting because you are not in the committee anymore, but you can still provide me with certain suggestions and information. I suspect the pattern I'm seeing is not new, so he forwarded his email to the committee to my previous advisor, and he prompted him to provide information on my dishonesty.

The professors on her committee who advocated for her questioned some of her second advisor's statements.

In the committee meeting, I simply fought with him because the way he approached the meeting, the way he commented on his own mistake was so shameless. I wouldn't imagine that a professor would say something like that. For example, one of my committee members asked him that there's something inconsistent in his memo and in my memo. He said I have applied for jobs but I said I had not and another committee member said, you did not ask Jia whether or not she has applied? He said no, and my committee member said,

“So you simply assumed she has applied?” And he said, “Yes I just assumed.” He didn’t apologize, he didn’t say, “I was wrong” on certain things.

Jia interpreted [the advisors’] response as “crazy.” She commented, “I heard a lot of stories about terrible advisors and nothing is comparable to my experiences. When I first came here I would never even in my dreams expect something like this.”

I can understand there may be miscommunications, that the advisor would disagree with students, and maybe they would have a bad relationship and they would switch to a different advisor. But there’s no way two professors would work together to take a student down. Why would they do that? And my previous advisor, obviously he still hated me. And he responded to the email and said something like, “Jia is dishonest, is not trustworthy, is no longer advisable.” It’s just a single claim without any evidence.

Jia speculated that one reason for the discord may have had some relationship to departmental interactions. Of her third, current advisor she remarked,

He’s on my committee. Actually he and I have been working together ever since I came here. So I was surprised that my first advisor didn’t pass me to this person when he left. And actually the reason had been obvious to me after that—because in this person’s committee, after my first advisor left he was taken off from the committee because maybe my current advisor knew him too well, and that he maybe knew that he was not going to be committed to the work so he just didn’t want this person to stay on the committee. So I guess that was the reason why my first advisor asked my second advisor

rather than my third advisor to be my major advisor at that point because in that case he was going to be able to control me better. That's my reasoning.

Jia was upset and confused by the series of events. She reported that her relationship with her third advisor is excellent, and that her new advisor is an excellent mentor. However, "My recent experience has changed my beliefs and values about academia. I used to think that academia is not the perfect world, but maybe the world I want to be a part of. But now I'm not sure about that."

She was still distressed about the course of her life and program thus far. Jia often reflected on the last year, to determine exactly where her relationship with her first advisor began to change. She was clearly bothered about this, and continued to search for meaning.

He thought I was talented, he thought I was obviously very bright, and he introduced me to someone else like this is our academic star—that's what he said. I wouldn't necessarily agree with him. I thought I'm just a very regular student. I just want to work hard and get what I deserve to get. I don't want to be the superstar. I don't want to capture too much attention to myself.

Jia's proposal was delayed for at least one year. She has her third advisor, but at the time of her interview, the second advisor had not completed the needed paperwork to sever his association with her committee. "On the paperwork he's still my advisor."

I haven't proposed yet because of this matter. It has been postponed. But my third advisor thought my proposal was in pretty good shape, and he wants to put the proposal in front of the committee as soon as we can. So we are

working hard on that. My second advisor, the most recent doctoral student graduated from our program under his advice was almost 20 years ago. He started a lot of students but they all switched to other advisors and now I understand why. I think he may make some really bad assumptions about his advisees. He thinks I'm a bad person, so there's no way for me to work with him.

As Jia reflected upon her past year, she commented that she paid a significant personal penalty, and that her family has also been affected by these events.

The worst thing is not about the time when I graduate, it's about the time when I need to look for faculty jobs. I have to look for those jobs in the fall and be interviewed in the spring if there's any. Since I haven't proposed yet I'm going to miss this fall's opportunities. And I'm an international student, so if I don't get a job soon enough after graduation I have to go back or I have to stay here as a dependent.

Conclusion

Although few students had difficulty relaying instances in which they had negative advising experiences, only one believed that she had a career-altering experience due to negatively. As adults, it is likely that doctoral students are better equipped to deal with adversity. It may also be the case that these students have strong senses of who they are and of what they are interested in doing. Advisors had power to change students' lives; a negative experience was not a deterrent.

On the other hand, international students are well aware of their lack of power in their relationships not only with their advisors, but with others as well. Although

the students were able to share only one side of their story, it is clear that some behaviors which took place were faculty-, rather than student-driven. Individuals who have power, and use it as a weapon against the powerless, it is not only bullying, but a threat to academic freedom.

Chapter 6

Communication and Social Relationships

Because culture shock is a prevalent theme in the literature associated with international students, all students interviewed were asked about culture shock. Students acknowledged or commented on only two types of culture shock: the rural/urban divide, and communication. No student labelled the academic community as a source of culture shock. With the exception of three students, the international doctoral students interviewed were living in the smallest city by population which they had ever encountered. The majority of students came from large, urban areas with vibrant night life and ample public transportation. This type of culture shock was overcome by purchasing vehicles, obtaining drivers' licenses, and simply becoming accustomed to a quieter environment. The students reported being well-treated by most citizens they encountered.

Culture shock

The more troublesome classification of culture shock related to language. When the doctoral students commented about culture shock, the phenomenon was always associated with language. Except for five students, no student claimed comfort with writing in a nonnative language.

Because the students were expected to study, research, and teach in English, many believed that their English was inadequate. Publishing and presenting at conferences were barriers to overcome for professional development. At an institution in which 23% of the graduate students were from other countries, language proficiency was essential to forming professional relationships. Language was the

most significant obstacle to international students who attempted to form supportive relationships, regardless of their program of study. For students who did not speak English as a primary social and educational language, attempts to find social opportunities to practice communication skills were often limited.

Language

Two of the students who were interviewed spoke English as a first language, and three others had studied only in English since they had begun elementary school. For the rest of the students, language was the most cited difficulty they encountered. The students who acknowledged experiencing transitional difficulties cited language and communication problems as their first concern. Language was the primary obstacle that the international doctoral students faced when studying abroad. English language fluency, or the students' lack of fluency, shaded all of their experiences. Even when asked specifically about culture shock, every conversation and interpretation shifted to the difficulties of learning to listen, speak, read, and write fluently in English.

Huan, a Chinese student, commented,

I think there are many culture shocks, but I get used to the American life here.

At first, I think that when we go to the restaurant, they ask us, 'For here or to go?' At first, we don't know about that, and we think, 'What do you mean?'

Many things happen, like when we are not good at English or get used to America yet.

Hamed, a Middle Eastern student, agreed,

This was my difficulty in my studies, in a broader framework -- language and some cultural issues, and not knowing some kind of traditions or things that are very common from the people who live here, have been my issues.

Language concerns may be broken down into four areas. First was the assumption that when a student's written fluency was good, other language skills are equally strong. Second, a student's speaking skills may have been good, but their writing was not fluent. Third were general communication problems that were associated with body language interpretations. Finally, there was the problem of simply finding and developing relationships, a topic which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Difficulties were related to language, communication, and cultural barriers. These barriers included making connections when the student was the only person from his or her country in the department or at the institution, when finding American friends, when finding trustworthy friends, and when forming relationships. Students regarded English as a struggle, but an essential obstacle which must be conquered. Abbas, from the Middle East, remarked, "Language is biggest barrier, always. If I knew the language better, if I was fluent, it takes maybe one-third of the time that I'm now taking."

Olivia, from Central America, said, "I think that the major obstacle is language because English is not my first language and I'm not used to having troubles with language." She continued, "I wish I had better English so I could be more helpful."

When asked about culture, Nuwa, who had earned her Bachelor's degree in the U.S., remarked that her early English language learning environment was a good experience for her.

Adjustment, I think the biggest thing I have gone through was language. I was not proficient in English, back, like eight years ago, so that was quite an adjustment, but like I said it was a small community, so it was really easy for me to reach out to my professors and to my peers for assistance, so that worked out well.

Students generally assumed that they bore the responsibility for their lack of understanding and affiliations. Huan, a Chinese student, discussed the burden of communication.

Language was a problem at the beginning, but now it's not quite a big deal. I was also thinking, too, about culture shock. Not too much. I'm trying to understand the people. Even though there is difference between me and other people, I try to understand.

Students made intentional efforts to accommodate their [perceived] language shortcomings. No student was satisfied with his or her language skills, and they each approached their educational experiences with a sense of purpose. Song, from China, intentionally chose an Indian advisor.

You know that's part of the reason, I chose my advisor because he is not Chinese. My friends, their advisors are Chinese, so when they have group, they speak Chinese, when they are in a lab they speak Chinese, but it is hard

to just speak English very often. But that is part of the reason, not the main reason, but part of the reason I chose this advisor.

Writing. Even more challenging was writing. Typically, language learning is on a continuum. Just as infants learn their language first by listening and then by speaking, these are generally the first skills foreign language learners encounter as well. The next skills are then reading, followed by the most difficult task, writing. Nuwa, a Chinese student with excellent idiomatic spoken English, said, “Writing is always a challenge.”

Although a student’s spoken language skills may be strong, it is a fallacy to assume that his or her writing is equally good. Nuwa, for example, had nearly native quality spoken English. She studied English intermittently, beginning in elementary school, attended a small college in the United States for her undergraduate studies, and then enrolled directly into a doctoral program at the research institution. Her major was in a program that had a substantial reading and writing component.

My English, some people think I don’t experience difficulty when I’m writing. I wish they could know, as international students, how much effort, how much extra effort we put into writing, reading. It’s just very time consuming. It demands a *lot* of time. I mean, it takes me a lot, a significant amount of time for me to complete assignments or reading assignments, compared to my American cohort. So I wish they can know that, and kind of take that into consideration. I will work twice as hard to produce a paper than other people can. I work extra hard to put in time, effort, into anything that I do, and it still doesn’t look like I tried hard. [Nuwa]

Nuwa expressed concern about the time that she was required to put in compared to her American peers.

I spend more time preparing for what I am going to go through, like presentations. I spent probably more time preparing for that, and my sessions, any kind of meetings that I take part in. I know other students prepare for their presentations, of course, but then they don't plan ahead as much as I do. I need to do that.

Abbas, a Middle Eastern student who also had excellent spoken English, remarked,

I have no problem reading in a book, but my vocabulary is not active, during my speaking and writing. And another problem about the speaking is I have no other one to talk English with, so maybe my experience of being native, in another language, is maybe partial?

Asima, a distance student, regretted her lack of access to institutional resources that would have been helpful in her writing.

The writing itself, the English is something I have to do, and to be honest with you, as an international student and as a second language speaker there wasn't much resources in that regard. I know for students, residents, they get help with tutoring, with math, with writing labs, they get writing specialists to help. This is not available for me as a distance student.

International doctoral students have spent their earlier academic lives as fluent, capable writers and scholars. They uniformly experienced significant

adjustments to how they thought of themselves, of their abilities, and of their schoolwork.

I was a very good student in [home], and at the beginning I sent my assignments to these American girls who helped me, and they did help me. I went to the writing center for them to help me but sometimes because of time you don't have enough time to do that. I said well, let's send the assignment like this. [Olivia]

Liko, a Chinese student, reflected upon the first manuscript he had ever submitted. He found the experience frustrating, but he also forgave himself for his lack of fluency.

One of my experiences with some manuscript, I submitted, the paper was about six or eight pages, but the feedback and comments was four pages! I try to think about it positively, and think, it's because he or she cares about our research, but it takes time to fix them. I don't know if people who were born in the U.S., who finish writing their manuscript. At least for me, I am not confident about my writing. It's understandable because I am not from here. [Liko]

Speaking. Similarly, Luli, a Chinese student who communicated with excellent spoken English, described a period of mutual frustration with her first American supervisor at another institution when she discovered she had not followed his instructions. She had not understood his spoken English despite having attended a school with a strong English language focus. Luli described her difficulties in distinguishing between the ways the word “can” and the contraction “can't” sounded

in spoken American English. Her misunderstanding or mishearing the way the two words sounded led her to repeat a lab error several times.

Yes, I had tons of culture shock two years ago during the first semester in Wyoming. One of the things is the language thing. The oral English. I remember my previous supervisor. I was working in his lab at the time, and I think I didn't just do right in one of the steps, but I did it a lot of times. I didn't go to check with him first, before I did a lot of wrong things. I couldn't find the right result, and then I went to talk to him. Then he explained to me like, blah, blah, blah, and then finally, he just said, "You can do that." It's just that, I was so confused! I can totally get that the whole conversation he meant, "You can't do that", but why he said, "You can do that." I just showed him my confused face, and he got it right away. He said, like, he just repeated, "You *can't* [enunciating the T] do that." [Luli]

Luli explained that she had needed to practice for months before she was able to discern the difference in tone and enunciation between the two sounds. She elaborated,

It's the mandatory thing for us, to study English at the elementary school. But we didn't pay much attention to oral English [at home], so you can see like lots of students, they can do the reading comprehension very well. They have super high GRE or GMAT, but they cannot speak that fluently. It's just a training thing. My English was a little different, because my middle school was a private school which was affiliated with one of the international

universities, so actually, I was just trained to speak more, instead of writing or reading. Luli]

Even with excellent English, developing a good vocabulary is a source of frustration. To a student in both a creative and theoretical program of study, the range of words, vocabulary, and expressions he had access to, compared to what he needed, and was too limited in his opinion. “My major needs a very vast and complicated vocabulary. Without language you cannot express yourself. Then you read some books, and you want to write something. It’s hopeless. You can’t say what you want.” [Abbas]

The primacy of acquiring skill in spoken English was undisputed. No student had attempted to survive with imperfect English language skills. All recognized their linguistic shortcomings. Failure to learn formal English represented a significant social and academic lapse. Failure to learn colloquial and conversational English was a personal challenge.

Anybody who wants to live in the U.S., they have to learn English, even if they don’t want to give up their other language. In this world if you speak English you can go almost anywhere. There is always someone who can speak English you can talk to.” [Liko]

Even though my English is getting better compared to my past, it’s still a communication barrier. Like when people talk in short term I cannot get it immediately. They have to explain it to me, and you know we lose the thread of communication. So usually, when people here from the university talk very fast, I want to cut in, but I have to think, “OK what are they talking about?”

That's a barrier. My major is a culture, communication language; I have to figure it out. [Lian]

Well, I can understand people very well. My listening is very good, but my speaking is not good. When I first came here, and I have a meeting like twice a week with my advisor. In that first semester, we had a pretty hard time. I can understand what he is talking about, but he has no idea what I'm talking about. When it comes to professional things, I still don't know how to describe my ideas, so normally I will draw a picture, or some key words, and maybe my advisor can understand me. [Song]

Students have found resources to support their language needs. Often, students experienced an inverse skills relationship; that is, students either communicate well in writing, or they communicated well in spoken English. Few students felt equally capable in both speaking and writing.

Writing is not too bad -- it's OK. And since we have the writing center in the English building, I have been there one semester, and they help me a lot. They are all American natives, and they help us to refine our papers, our coursework." [Song]

Body language. The many ways in which people behave were also challenging for students to interpret. Body language and behavior were often sources of confusion. "Because I am learning the, decoding people's behavior," a Chinese student explained. A Middle Eastern student said,

The biggest problem is language. Communication is hard, not based on language, based on culture. I can't sometimes understand - body language is

another thing. It's my problem. Also, I am not a very social person. I can't connect with others. It takes time. [Abbas]

I'm not familiar with Americans, but for Chinese, I can divide them into different categories that I can know their motives. But for Americans, I don't know, and also it depends on your own experiences a lot. If you know a person, and then later you can meet another person, and then you can compare. [Feng]

A common theme among students was that it was easy to read people from their own culture, but considerably more difficult to understand others. They assume the problem is their own.

Relationships

Departments. Doctoral students appear to find most of their social relationships within either their academic department or their conational group.

I would say the first friends that I made would just be my lab mates, some post docs, and some graduate students, and just some people in the department. I started to make more new friends when I was attending training, and there are a lot of [conational] students here too. [Luli]

Although many departments are populated with students from a single country, culture, or ethnic group, the academic department was frequently the international graduate student's gateway to a diverse social group.

In departments in which there was some diversity, international students had access to students from other countries. It is possible that in departments in which there was little diversity, a student from a different country may actually feel more

welcomed. Huan recalled a trip she and her officemates took to [see a nature preserve]. “I am the only Chinese person in that office.” She remarked that it was a very cold day, and one of her office mates forced her own husband to give Huan his jacket, an act of chivalry that pleased her.

Nuwa enjoyed spending time with her classmates,

I do spend time with my cohort. We get tired of seeing each other, because we are in the same classes all together, but I really appreciate the feedback they give me, and the collaboration. I think it’s a pretty good cohort. We don’t get along all the time, but we try to. [Nuwa]

On a large campus, students may be in multiple offices, buildings, or campuses for their program. The geography of a student’s academic life may influence his or her ability to establish lasting relationships. Just as faculty members may have more than one office, or because of academic funding arrangements, international doctoral students may be in different buildings or campuses. One student had offices on two campuses.

Students within a department may seldom see one another because of personal, class, or lab scheduling. Another factor was related to whether the students are engaged in individual or group research projects. Students who typically worked as teams or who shared lab or office space had more close relationships within their departments than students who had individual projects.

Since our direction in research is not the same, we don’t have the same lessons or classes. We don’t have the same advisors, we don’t have meetings, so it’s hard. We don’t have the opportunity to know each other.” [Song]

Departmental relationships at the doctoral level may have priority over opportunities to establish friendships with people from their own country. For example, the Chinese Student Organization offered many activities, but the doctoral students who were from China believed that the activities were primarily created for the undergraduate population.

I think it is for undergrad students. I did go to their annual barbeque for the freshmen, and then I was one of the few graduate students. I would say there are not that many Chinese grad students who are attending events like that. I feel they are still kids. [Meili]

Events which Chinese doctoral students attended were major cultural activities, such as for the Chinese New Year, or the Spring Festival, but regular social events were “minimally helpful.”

Departments and schedules can be constraining. “Another thing I think maybe can be helpful for international students, at least for me is, because I have a hard time meeting other Chinese students and other international students,” Song said.

It’s the connections. I don’t seem to know anyone outside of my program.

Where do I reach out to other groups? Sometimes there are events and things like that, but I figure, maybe there is something we can do more of that.”

[Nuwa]

Other organizations. On the other hand, students discovered other organizations which were helpful to them in creating social affiliations. For example, the Chinese Fellowship for Christ (CFC) was a source of support. “I went to church

since I was a little child, my church in China, but I didn't get baptized at that time. After I came to the U.S., three months later I got baptized here." [Yun]

Feng commented, "There are many Chinese students in the Chinese church, and they help me a lot."

One national organization which held activities for graduate students was the Iranian Student Organization [ISO]. Because only one Iranian student at [institution] was an undergraduate, the ISO was quite socially functional for graduate students. Iranian students remarked that this was a good entry point for them to make contacts, locate housing, and find a temporary place to live. They also appreciated traditional celebrations of the Persian New Year and Yalda [winter solstice].

A Colombian student spoke of a new organization which they used for cultural education and outreach. Recently organized, the Colombian students gathered together for national holidays.

Right now I would say there's a significant amount. I mean we don't compare with people from China or people from India but yeah I would say [there are] about 30 students or so . . . We celebrate together every special holiday. We try to share our culture with the [city] community so we organize events and stuff. In January we made a small carnival celebration and we danced and stuff. [Isabella]

Conational Students. Students were deeply interested in reaching out to others, and in meeting people. Social interactions with people from other cultures were further complicated when the student was in a department that was comprised of any co-national students and faculty members.

Another problem we specifically have here for our program is that the majority of graduate students are [from my country] in this program. I maybe know two or three other students and none of them are American, unfortunately. I wish we had more American graduate students for [this program]. So this is kind of an obstacle for having relationships more than common relationships with Ph.D. students in our department. [Hamid]

For another student, everyone in his department, including his advisor, was Chinese.

I'm a little bit [disappointed] about myself because I don't have too many American friends to help me develop my interests. I spend a lot of time with Chinese friends. All the students in my [research] group are Chinese. [Liko]

There are nearly 800 Chinese students at [institution]. For Chinese students who wanted many friends from their own country, such relationships were easily established. For students who wanted a more diverse social circle, large numbers of Chinese friends were an obstacle to contact with other cultures. Lian remarked, "There are so many Chinese students it may be hard to escape. I don't mean that badly, I mean there are so many. I know I told my friends that, 'Hey, you make my English poorer.'"

Seeking friends. Students who sought diversity could find it, but they were constrained by language. "Most of my friends are Chinese. I also have Indian friends, American friends, but there is no question most of my friends are Chinese. And it's because the language, mostly the language is a problem." [Yun]

Feng, a relatively new student, was not certain that diverse groups of friend were important.

I think that it's difficult to find a person who is very similar with you. Maybe you have many habits, if you want to go hiking, you can find a friend who as the same habits. If you go fishing you find different people to satisfy yourself.
[Feng]

Nuwa was grateful to find someone from her country in her department, "My best friend, she is in the [program]. She is Chinese. I mean, it's just easier, in so many different ways." Although the women did not know one another before their studies, they were roommates and colleagues as well as friends.

Hamid described his activities as a leader on campus. One structural issue was that his college had programs on two campuses and in two cities. "We have an association here and I'm president of that. We had some monthly gatherings and we invited graduate students from [school] and [school] from different programs." He commented that there was a considerable logistical problem bringing students together, and keeping everyone informed about activities.

It is difficult for the students to the problem that we have here is two different parts of [university], and the [college] itself so it's separated from those campuses. So it's just a building with limited amounts of graduate students. So practically, there are not such possibilities to know different graduate students. [Hamid]

Olivia appreciated the positive attributes of university housing, though she did not plan to live in university housing for four years. She moved after her first

semester, and shared an apartment with an international student from a different country than her own.

For example I come from a big family. I have four sisters and we are very family oriented. We are always together, so I loved that there was always people. So when you were tired of studying you went downstairs and there was always to talk to -- usually a very interesting person. That was the first time I met Muslim people and now I know a little about them. For example this guy from Rwanda and I read a lot about the genocide in Rwanda.

Sometimes I ask him a little about that. So for me I loved that. I think that I like to be with people and I don't like to be alone, but of course the kitchen was always dirty. [Olivia]

Yun, a STEM student discussed a faith-based organization that she participated in. She was a member of the Chinese Fellowship for Christ [CFC].

During the regular semester, we have Bible study, but we just stopped for the summer. We will start in the fall. I forget if it is Tuesday or Wednesday night that we have Bible study regularly, in the Nebraska Union, and that's very nice." [Yun]

Yun was also a member of her department association, but she was less likely to participate in that organization because she lived closer to [different campus], and she needed to drive to attend many activities on [campus]. Although she had a car, she tended to avoid driving.

Developing American friends was a challenge for all students. "I spend most of my time with Chinese friends, I think, you know, it's still OK; it's just hard to get

into American culture. Maybe hard, maybe take some time,” said Song. Although virtually all international doctoral students wanted American friends, most did not have a large number of Americans to turn to. The majority of students blamed themselves, but noted that American students were not particularly accessible outside their departments.

The biggest problem is language. Communication is hard, not based on language, but based on culture, I can’t sometimes understand, body language is another thing. It’s my problem also. I am not a very social person. I can’t connect with others. It takes time. People are kind but not friendly. [Abbas] I think it is very interesting. For example, in [dormitory] I had a lot of friends from all over the world. With the Americans I think it is hard to—maybe because they have their families and their lives here, so they are not very interested in you. And the international students. because you are alone and you are trying to connect with people, maybe it’s easier. But yeah. for example in [dormitory] there were a lot of international students from everywhere—I don’t know a lot of [conational students]. Olivia

Avoiding relationships. Doctoral studies are challenging and not all students want to engage socially with others, despite the benefits which may be associated with such interactions. A Fulbright scholar commented that although she had many opportunities to develop a social life, she needed to study on weekends. [Aninda] Another was concerned that if she let her grades slip, she would be removed from her program of studies. [Selena] One student described an earlier institution in his home country.

For finding job opportunities, networking, and different things, it was a very, very helpful and supportive place for this kind of activity. Every student spends most of their time there instead of classrooms, and this was helpful for knowing more people, solving problems, finding jobs, different things. But here students prefer to be segregated to stay in their office and not having relationships with others. [Hamed]

Strategies for engagement

Students acknowledged that graduate studies and undergraduate studies have different characteristics. Undergraduates were perceived as having much more free time, “I mean we do spend time, but not that much? Since everybody is busy with their work, and some people are married, some people are engaged, so they have their family time and things like that. So I would say it’s mixed”. [Nuwa]

Some students have been able to use their international status as a means of connecting with others. “Being an international student from a personal perspective, just thinking about your friends, it helps bring out very interesting conversations with people about your country of origin and your life and you being here thousands of miles away from home.” [Dawud]

The university makes my life know other friends here, so it contributes to my life in a positive way to us. If they have the same morals and — not extreme people -- actually I became a friend with my Indian colleague and his wife during this visit to New York because he accompanied us. So it’s no problem. Our friends are many people from different backgrounds. But we cannot get along with extreme people. [Yusuf]

Students attempted to find time to pursue other interests. One man has continued his love for ballroom dancing, although he was between partners at the time of his interview. He observed that it was more difficult to find a good dancing partner than it was to find a girlfriend.

For international students in the U.S., the hard part for most people, they should not refuse, but it's kind of hard to connect with the right people. For me, besides academics, I also try to find people who can share the same interest with me. That helps me a little bit. In the first year here, it was really hard. I found this dancing group at [institution]. We can do some activities every week. [Liko]

Huan went skydiving, and she reported that it was fun, though she vomited afterwards. One Chinese student looked for a place that taught kendo, a type of Japanese swordsmanship. "Because I think it's a good way to develop not only physical, but also the spirit. And you can find a place where you can pour, p-o-u-r your emotions." [Feng]

Lian developed the practice of being engaged with her community through her earlier work experiences. This practice has served her well as a doctoral student. "I went to every volleyball game, every basketball game, every football game, and they know me, and they say, hey look at her, I know she is [from another country], but she belongs to us." Although Lian had friends from her own country, she believed that they hurt her English learning. "I think that if I feel really confident I am really happy." She noted that one communication problem she had was because she was taking classes in a different college at the institution, and she was not certain that she

was welcomed in classes that were outside of her major. She did not know whether her impression was due the culture of the class, or if it was because none of the students in the classes knew her.

Nuwa, an Arts and Sciences student, deliberately sought an American roommate, although she did not describe their relationship as a close one.

We live together. She has a boyfriend, so she spends most of her time with her boyfriend. She probably is gone 60% of the time so I have the apartment to myself. We go grocery shopping together and we have some contact.

[Nuwa]

Olivia, a Central American student, reported that her department and her inclinations have each given her opportunities to engage.

In my research team one is American and the other girl is from China. She is very nice. I think we have a good team. I think this has been a very international experience for me. I know a lot of people from a lot of places.

My roommate is Muslim, for example. [Olivia]

Christian organizations were credited with outreach to international students. Three Chinese students were involved in religious organizations. Although Yun had been a practicing Christian in China, she was not baptized until she came to the U.S. At the university, she joined a Chinese Baptist group, through which she met her husband.

On the other hand, Feng and Huan were not religious at all, but they liked being members of the religious groups because they felt welcomed by Americans. Feng found a church off campus. Although he was uncertain of its denomination, the

people were kind to him and included him in activities and events. Huan was a member of a campus Christian group. “See, my friends are mostly in this college, and they are Chinese students. But I also have American friends who are from the Christian Student Fellowship [CSF]. And they are really nice; I enjoy hanging out with them as well.” [Huan] She went onto emphasize that she was not particularly interested in religions, but she found the CSF members to be nice and friendly people whom she enjoyed spending time with.

Loneliness. More significant than adaptation and culture shock issues were problems of loneliness. Many students arrive at the university and enter programs of study because they already have close ties with one or more people who are already students, faculty members, or community members. For 27 students at the Midwestern research institution, however, they were the only individuals on campus from their respective countries. Even Chinese and Indian students, who come from large, linguistically, and culturally diverse countries, do not necessarily have friendships in place when they arrive.

I don’t have any relatives in the United States. I just got here by myself, and had a new start, something like that. I have a very close friend, she is living in Los Angeles right now - she is interning there. We were high school friends. She started her bachelor’s degree here in the United States. So far, she has been in the United States for six to seven years. But she is just a friend, and she is a little bit far away from me, and we just meet like during the spring break, or summer vacation. [Luli]

Not all students acknowledged that loneliness was a concern for them. For example, Feng, who had just completed his first semester in the U.S., seemed untroubled by problems of loneliness. For him, poor companionship was worse than being alone. “No. I’m not very lonely because I am always alone by myself. I don’t want to be alone, but I don’t want to stay with people I don’t like. I like people who have similar habits with me.” [Feng]

Lowella was also a relatively new student. She struggled with the length of time she needed in which to develop a mutually satisfactory relationship with her roommate.

I don’t know, maybe it’s good to get together with fellow international students, maybe we can relate to each other, My [American] roommate, she cannot relate to me, because she is from here, so sometimes, I cry, and she says, “Why?” [Lowella]

Abbas came to the [institution] with a childhood friend. Both men had the same background and they were in the same field of study. Through their years in the U.S., he watched as their friendship deteriorated during their time at the institution. “We are educated and we grew up in the same situation, and we think really the same, except in some fundamental things, innate, I think.” They had attended the same institutions, and they knew one another both personally and professionally. Now, far from home, Abbas said he and his friend had not spoken to one another in months. He experienced feelings of both professional and personal loneliness. In part, he regretted the breach because he would have appreciated the scholarly support of a colleague. “We can’t talk about our project. I feel kind of competitive about

everything between us, so I don't have a classmate at the moment. I'm the only person that knows about my project." [Abbas]

Lack of diversity may be a surprising issue for international students; there are several university departments in which most international students are from the same country. For students from that population, finding friends outside of their departmental community is challenging. This phenomenon is common in many institutions (Beech, 2014a; Beech, 2014b; Hackney, Boggs, Kathawala, & Hayes, 2014).

What are Friends?

When asked about relationships and friendships, many students replied, "What is a friend?" This proved to be a difficult question. "Not mostly, maybe half-half, I guess? But usually the friendship is a little bit hard to define," Luli, a Chinese student remarked. She continued,

Like you and your co-worker in the same lab. Are you friends? You and your professor? Friends or something like that. It's a little bit hard to define, but as time goes by you will finally be able to figure out if you are friends. And I care about friendships a lot. [Luli]

Feng, who had also stated that he would rather be alone than in poor company, remarked, "I don't know how you define a friend. You have people who are familiar with you, who can ask for or offer to help. It takes time." [Feng]

Liko, a Chinese student, spoke at length about friendship and loneliness. "I feel that I, when I came to the US, I'm very excited and curious about this country." He liked living in the U.S., but he was also ready to move on. He believed that he

needed work experience in the U.S. before returning home, but he was looking forward to leaving.

But after spending several years here, I feel that more and more, I want to go back and live closer to my parents and my friends. It feels like the connection between my friends and my family is stronger than it was, and I think that's the main reason to help me make a plan for the future. The reason I didn't, I don't intend to go back to China immediately is, I have to consider my career, with work experience, it [American work experience] is better to get a better job and salary in China. [Liko]

Liko made a profound statement about loneliness, "Only half of me lives here. The other part of me spends time with them, on the other side of the earth." [Liko]

Despite his commitment to returning to China, he continued to seek new experiences, and to form new ties.

It is helpful to know new friends. It can help you to discuss, and to develop your ideas. New friends also help you from thinking about your family and your home too much. It's good to think about them, but it's not good to keep thinking about them and give up your current life." [Liko]

Olivia was grateful when her advisor encouraged other graduate students to assist her. They picked her up at the airport, arranged for a place to stay until her residence hall opened, and they helped her with her belongings. One student took her to the bank to open an account, to Walmart to buy essential items, and to the international office. Not only were the students performing useful tasks, the close contact and the safe opportunity they created for Olivia to ask questions made it

easier for her to feel comfortable and friendly with them. “They were very helpful. They were very nice. So I had a very nice adviser, these girls helped me out a lot.”

[Olivia]

Friendships

The international students placed a great deal of value in the strength of an individual friendship. Simply having a single resource to turn to, who had experience and who would provide trustworthy information, was important and appreciated.

When asked who she talked to and spent time with, Aninda replied,

I deal mostly with my friends instead of my advisor in dealing with my life adjustment here in Lincoln. So I have a friend from [my country] and my roommate is from [my country] too, so I think it’s very helpful because she told me where I need to go, if I want to go shopping to find halal meat she said just go to an Arabic store. I ask her a lot, especially in dealing with the university environment. For example, when I deal with my Fulbright and I need to make a report and then to renew my grant or something like that. She told me who to go to. [Aninda]

The [institution] has a group which promotes student-on-student mentoring. However, when Aninda tried to take advantage of the opportunity to build a relationship with a U.S. student through that program, she found the relationship was unsatisfactory. She commented because the student’s status was equal to her own, she felt that her student mentor lacked credibility.

So that’s from [college student association]; they underwrite a mentoring program but I don’t think it worked for me because I had a mentor but I rarely

met her. We actually had the same class in the first semester but because I didn't know what to ask because I think I was struggling with the class and I didn't have any other problems other than in the class. And because we were taking the same class I didn't think how she will help me because we are working in the same one. [Aninda]

Elaheh came to [institution] because she had several friends already at the university. After researching her opportunities, she decided to apply for a position at the university based initially upon friendship ties.

I first came for seeing my friends and then I've been admitted to Ph.D. program back [at another institution]. When I moved here, I decided I'd just try showing my resume to some people here on campus, and my background was in engineering. And then so I was thinking, "What should I do?" Then I talked to one of the professors in [original program] and he advised me to go and talk to people. Then I showed my resume to them and my advisor had a project related to [program] and so I was the right match for them. [Elaheh]

Olivia used her semester in university housing as an opportunity to make friends. She believed the international students looked out for one another.

They are so supportive — "Are you traveling? Do you need a ride to the airport?" You receive so much that you are willing to say, "Yes of course, if I can help anyone please let me know." I know what it is to be alone and a little lost and to receive so much help, so I feel very committed to helping others.

[Olivia]

For several students, patience paid off. Finding comfortable relationships took time, and through patience and good luck, they were able to find satisfactory relationships despite cultural differences. Aninda, Lowella, Meili, Luli, and Huan all reported that they had fulfilling friendships. Although they still felt homesick at times, they also reported that they finally had a strong friendship network.

So when I first came here, I was the only Chinese in my department.

In my department, mainly they are just American students. And I just felt really lonely because back home I had a lot of friends and I could always find someone to talk to. Especially when I first came here, there were no friends and a lot of confusion. Later on I started making a few friends, and really good ones. In China, people can get really intimate, really close, really fast. I feel that here it's not the same. Everyone values their own privacy. You couldn't just call and say, come over, have lunch, have dinner, let's study together. In the second year there was another Chinese girl, and we became really good friends, best friends. We spend a lot of time together, and also, I have really close friends within the department and we hang out together.

[Meili]

Conclusions

Students were most concerned about language and communication; after advising, communicating their work and cultivating relationships were the priorities for most students. Two avoided forming deep personal relationships, but most students craved them. Two women reported that they took every opportunity to engage with the community and with others. No student was able to identify any

institutional support for promoting friendships, or even for learning better English, beyond the writing assistance. A culture shock gathering was offered by the ISSO, but the international doctoral students were affected by language, not by U.S. or higher education culture.

Unlike findings from studies of international undergraduate students, the international doctoral students were less concerned about the relationships they established outside of their department. Outside friendships were welcomed, but were not necessary. Some students reported that their advisors made extra efforts to connect them with others in the department. Those students not only recognized what the advisor was doing, they were uniformly grateful for the compassionate assistance in fostering initial connections. They felt they were being cared for, and cared about.

Because of the individualized nature of doctoral students, the students were absorbed into departmental cultures. The students all appeared to have American and other international friends they could call upon. Most reported having more international friends, however, because many American friends' students had to attend to family responsibilities in the U.S. International doctoral students' spouses and children often accompany them abroad, but single students were otherwise freed from extended family responsibilities. Despite professions of homesickness, several students noted that they felt liberated to be far from relatives and family concerns.

Faculty advisors should remember the value of small gestures that make international doctoral students feel included and appreciated. As the gatekeepers to the students' education and social network, little effort is required to foster productive students and strong working relationships.

Chapter 7

Power, Family, and Economics

International doctoral students are well educated and highly intelligent. Because they are normally quite articulate and well-spoken, it is easy to imagine that they have few problems that cannot be resolved through their education. However, the experience of being an international student in the United States is neither simple nor straightforward, just as being a doctoral student is a challenge. For international students who are also doctoral students, power and powerlessness are frequent themes in conversations. Politics, world affairs, academics, family, and economics were all factors that affected student productivity.

Political powerlessness

Studying and living in a foreign country requires a visa. Students who require visas are subject to all laws of the U.S., but have few privileges. Appendix 3 lists the types of immigration statuses of students in this study.

Visas

F-1 Visa. The single most influential variable in an international doctoral student's experience is the visa. Most international students have an F-1 visa, which is one of two types of visas allocated for students. [The M-1 visa is for vocational, non-language training.] Students must first be admitted to an approved school, which provides them with the needed documentation to apply at an embassy or consulate in their home country. Students who live in countries which do not have U.S. consular services must go to another country for this service; Iranian students, for example,

must travel to Lebanon, Turkey, Armenia, or one of the Gulf States to apply for their visas.

Off-campus employment is restricted for international students. Students may not work off campus for the first year, but they may have the opportunity to work in certain types of employment later. Those jobs must be related to future career goals, but they are rare, competitive with U.S. workers, and strictly monitored. Approved jobs of this type are weighted in favor of STEM professions.

Because visa renewal is never guaranteed, many students do not want to risk returning home and having their studies temporarily or permanently interrupted. Students with single-entry visas may be in the U.S for a decade without returning home. International students are allowed to work on campus; they are, after all, recipients of assistantships. Although students are not allowed to perform work which is not related to developing their particular skill set, they may work off campus during summer sessions under some circumstances (USCIS, 2013).

Other visa types. J-1 visas are less common among international doctoral students. They are visitor exchange visas for temporary education or cultural experiences. The H1-B visa is for temporary workers who have at least a bachelor's degree, and who have a "specialty occupation." The H1-B visa is for three years, and may be extended to six years.

Spouses. Spouses of international students, as well as their children, have F-2 visas. Although minor children can receive free K-12 education in U.S. public schools, spouses may not attend higher education institutions in a degree program, unless they have been accepted under their own student visas, and under no

circumstances are they permitted to work. The F-2 visa expires when the student's visa expires; however, the visa does not require both members of the family to be in the same country at the same time.

Isabella had a J-2 visa when she arrived, so she was able to work in a regular job; when she was accepted for full-time studies, she was able to change her visa to an F-1. Similarly, Sophia's husband was able to change his visa from an F-2 to a J-2, so he was able to look for outside employment. Spouses of H1-B visa holders are not permitted to work, although there has been legislation proposed which could change that law.

Life with a visa. Sophia, from South America, remarked that life on a visa was a crash course in American immigration law. In her family of four, the members each had a different legal status: she had a standard F-1 visa, and her daughter, who was born in the U.S., was an American citizen. Her son had an F-2 visa, and her husband had recently been able to change his status to J-2. Her husband's status was a great relief, because he was then legally able to work in the U.S.

Dawud had recently been able to apply for, and receive, an H1B visa. This transition had been a relief to him because he would be able to more easily visit his family. He spoke about how his status has spilled into his entire family's life.

I feel like I've also affected my family's life. My sister has postponed her wedding until past my graduation so I can come, or else she knows I would not be able to risk coming before I defend - in the not-so-fortunate case that I get sent there and not being able to come back here. [Dawud]

Dawud said the ISSO had been helpful to him; the staff was generally knowledgeable and polite, but he commented,

But it's stressful for me to go there [ISSO] because when I go there it means I have a problem, and there are several points throughout my graduate degree where I almost had to go back [home] and not finish.

Dawud believed that being an international student was unnecessarily difficult, and that times when his needs and personal issues conflicted with university rules and policies frequently made his life more complicated than it should have been. Even making the seemingly positive transition from an F-1 to an H-1B visas was fraught with frustration.

Another example of being an international student there was some sort of policy to move me from an F-1 visa to an H1-B visa and that process happened later, by a few days, than it should have. So I couldn't register for classes and we had to go tell people it's just a few days, and that there's university policy involved and administrators need to talk about this. [Dawud]

Dawud complained that during his status change, it seemed as if every problem that was solved led to another, even more complex problem. In his case, there could be no space between being on an F-1 visa and on an H-1B visa, because he would be in the U.S. illegally during that brief period, even if that period was only for one day.

Well I got officially hired on the 4th but the 3rd was the last day I can ask for tuition remission... I wouldn't worry if I was not an international student. I would have said, "Ok, I am not going to register for this semester." I would

have postponed and still worked on my stuff, and I can come back because I'm an American. I would just be able to work and register the next semester.

Because of that single day, he had to deal with other levels of university bureaucracy. "For me, you're on this visa that forces you to be registered. And then because of this one-day issue, this is going to cost you \$8000 when this should cost you \$200, maybe." He spoke of his feeling of powerlessness during this period.

You're at the mercy of the American consulate, and the mercy of immigration here, and you're at the mercy of the university. There's so many different levels of people who can with one mistake or one decision decide that you can no longer finish your dream. And I say dream because I really do not believe someone wants to go through the difficulties of graduate school without being committed, without wanting to do a graduate degree, and understanding that it's difficult. No one really just does that. [Dawud]

Visa holders are also affected by their home country's relationship with the U.S. In the case of students who hold a single entry visa, students who leave the U.S. must reapply for a new visa from outside of the country. They have no assurance their visas will be renewed. Although visa renewal is frequently a routine task that takes less than a week, geography and foreign policy matter. One student from a Middle Eastern country noted, "To get my visa to the U.S., I stayed more than two months to get it. I was here later than the date in my contract so it was very stressful for me. All this security." [Yusuf]

For students from countries in which there are no U.S. consular offices, they must travel to another country to renew their visas. For example, Iranian students

must travel to countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, or one of the Persian Gulf states to apply for a visa. This adds more time and expense to a process that for other students is routine. An Iranian student commented on the difficulties of a single-entry visa.

Everything is straightforward, but the only problem is that most of the Iranian students, and I'm in the same situation, they have a single visa so going back home is like a dream. Every night I dream about my parents coming here or I go back there. It's too much challenge sometimes. [Elaheh]

She originally had a multiple entry visa, "First I had a multiple entry visa but it was just for two years so I traveled back to Iran two Christmases ago. And then my visa expired." Because she was in a doctoral program, she was concerned about returning home before her academic work was complete.

If I go back home I have to apply for a visa again. I'm ready to take that risk but the thing is that I prefer my parents to come here and visit me. And even that process is hard because my parents don't speak English and I have to go through all the visa application process for both of them. And they have to travel to another country for applying for visa. [Elaheh]

In contrast, some students from China manage to return home nearly annually. Liko reported that he had been back to China every year.

For me, it's OK. I think it depends on the major. I have some friends in biology, like pharmaceutical, maybe they are close to chemistry or something, so, each time they go back to China, they apply for a new visa, they are checked for more mess. [Liko]

Academic Power and Powerlessness

Of the students interviewed, only three expressed true unhappiness with their programs and their situations. The rest expressed satisfaction, contentment, and feelings of their value to their departments and to the university.

Feeling Important to the Institution

Many international doctoral students were able to develop a strong sense of their value as professionals. Dawud spoke of his tangible contribution, “Let’s talk about my professional work, being a specialist, supporting faculty that come from different skill sets with different knowledge.” He felt highly competent and useful as an educator.

You can start with someone at one stage, and two or three courses later you can see they started to incorporate more collaboration, more student engagement in an online course. Things like that make you feel important. It makes you feel like you’ve accomplished something.[Dawud]

Dawud also could see that he had made a lasting contribution to other students at the institution, through engagement in a student organization.

Maybe my last two years of graduate school I was involved in one way or another in a [student] association. I was the president of the [association] in my Master’s, I was [chair] in the [association], and I got asked to run for president but I was too busy. Being able to help and accomplish simple things like you’re part of this community that wants to help graduate students and when you accomplish something. Now, if a woman is pregnant, her spouse can go check books out in her name. That’s a good step forward. [Dawud]

He also learned from his teaching experiences, “Looking at your students grow over the course of the semester and accomplish stuff. I think I’ve been somewhat useful.” [Dawud]

Gabriela, who reported having a somewhat contentious relationship with her advisor, felt she was making a contribution that also would ultimately benefit her career, as well as the institution. She was pleased that she had assisted a U.S. government agency with her experience and expertise.

Even though my advisor is so tough, he always comes to me for assistance with—he does a lot of extension work and he helps [businesses] in the U.S when they have issues with their operations. When he’s contacted by them he usually delegates that to me to provide the assistance to the processors that contacted him. I got the chance to provide my advice, and that actually helped to reopen the market later. It was good, and I’ve had a lot of experiences like that working in the labs, so that’s why I—even though it’s sometimes a headache, I also feel glad to be here because of the experiences I had. Probably other students in my field haven’t had the chance to do this.

[Gabriela]

Not all students have made large-scale contributions to their programs, but students had few difficulties recalling feelings of importance.

Of course here, because I am assigned a job and I have publications, so I’m contributing in something, so my department shows up beside my name on publications, so I feel important. [Yusuf]

Even after two years, this last year, I think now after I am starting to teach, I am more important than the usual student here. That was very good, both for my confidence, and my program. [Abbas]

During that research project sometimes I did something that after seeing its effect I thought that this was a good action. And getting feedback from other members, my advisor made me feel this way, that my actions were creative. [Hamid]

Meili observed that she was more highly regarded in her family. When she returned home for a visit, she noticed their pride in her accomplishments.

I mean they are really proud of me, especially my dad is really proud of me. But at the same time, I'm still me, I'm still the sister, I'm still the daughter, but I do feel my siblings and my parents treat me as more mature. They would ask for my opinions, they would ask me to help them with something, so I think they perceive me as more mature, more independent, more reliable? It is a big deal for my family I guess. For my parents' generation, not a lot of them had the luxury to go to higher education. So that's why my dad values education really, very much. So I really appreciate that my parents never told me that girls should not get a Ph.D. They just told me, do what you want to do, and if they think it is like pride to the family. [Meili]

Difficult experiences

Although Abbas now felt that he was making a real contribution to his department, he initially had difficulty finding where he fit in. Because his advisors had little real knowledge of his field, he required time to adjust, and to make his own

way in the department. His experience reminded him of his compulsory military service.

I thought that I am wasting my time, and I felt broke; before I came here I was in the military. We had obligatory military service for two years in [my country]. We had two months of boot camp. And during that time, I had the same feeling. You are totally like many others, we don't have any identity. I felt the same. And I had many capabilities. Before that, I was a professor, so I taught in some universities, colleges. I had my firm, everything I wanted, and then I had military service. Then I had nothing, and they treat us like trash, so I had the same feeling in the second year that I was here. After that it's getting better. [Abbas]

Mehrana had a very complex academic career. Beginning with a BS in mechanical engineering, she earned an MS in biomedical engineering in her home country. In the U.S., her research was a synthesis of the two fields. She had offices in two different departments which both contributed to her funding. Because she had difficulties passing the qualifying exams in one department, she risked losing half her funding and she was uncertain how, or even whether, her research could proceed. "I think the only difficulty I faced in the university was my instability in my situation in changing from this department to that department without having any background. It makes me very uncomfortable and in a very bad situation." [Mehrana]

Selena, whose husband was also a full-time student, described her family's vulnerability to uncertainty.

We feel that we need to work harder because if we want to stay in the country, which is why you guys say it's not so serious when you [don't do well] in classes and stuff. But for me and my husband, we have to. [Selena]

Yusuf described his vulnerability as a student and as a researcher through relating the experiences of a colleague who was forced to leave the department and to return home.

I don't feel like stability or safety here. My contract may end at one year and I may leave at any time. Two other students came at the same time I came here from the American University of _____, a very prestigious university, and they had to leave after one semester. It's unplanned. The most important thing is that you should work hard. It's easy to lose my position or lose my degree here. Very easy. So each international student really works hard and gives all his time to this. One midterm in one course a student does not do well and it was decided that in this course he will not get a B+. He was moved with his wife. They were a new couple and they buy new furniture. They were settled here, and after one semester they leave. It's a great loss, of course money loss and time, and so this is something not good. I feel that if I leave here it's a great disaster for me. I'll need to settle in a new place.

[Yusuf]

Dawud tried to sum up all the difficulties and challenges that international doctoral students faced in their academic lives and livelihoods.

It's difficult being a graduate student that's international. There are no policies in place that protect the international graduate student. I'm not

talking about just any graduate student—it's important to point out international because you are much more vulnerable. You are in a much weaker position to negotiate anything and you are at the mercy of everybody. The person who hires you, the person who gives you your assistantship, the person who advises you. Any glitch could mean the end of your career, and having that pressure year after year - it's not comfortable. I mean you're teaching me and you want me to succeed. You want me to be a good student, you want me to get good grades, but you put me in an environment that's not easy to navigate. And it's not just the graduate student experience. There are things that come with graduate school that are just expected. I'm talking about life changing; someone does a mistake in your application and BOOM! You could be gone. And to resolve it you have to walk around begging people to make phone calls to see who can help you. In my case I'm pretty social, I have no problem asking for help when I need it, and I feel comfortable with it especially if it's going to save my graduate career. What if you have a shy graduate student who doesn't have the experience? [Dawud]

Spouses and family

Only five students who were interviewed had children. Seventeen, or exactly half, of the students interviewed were married. Four students married either because the student planned to study abroad, or they married earlier than originally planned in order to ensure that their spouses would be able to get visas.

Yusuf, from a Middle Eastern country, had a rational plan to marry because he believed marriage would increase the probability that he would return to his home country. He wanted a domestic tie. Yusuf described his thought process.

So I decided that when I do this [study abroad], I decided to get married at the same time. I have many good relations with many people. I have a huge number of relatives. I told everybody I knew, that I want to have a good wife. And my wife is the daughter of one of my father's friends. I know her father and her brother really well, but I don't know her, I have never seen her before. And when I know that they had a daughter I knew I should go to this home to get married. I decide to marry this woman so we get engaged for one month. I visit her once a week to have discussion and to give ourselves a decision, a chance to have this decision. It's not easy of course to get married to some person which cannot get along with you. Both of us, we may be the best people in the world, but if we cannot get along with each other . . . So we give ourselves a chance like nine months to think, and after thinking we agreed we can get along with each other. I respect her, I like her morals, and I like her style of living. I feel blessed that I have chosen a good wife. Both of us are really convinced that it was a good decision to get married. I won't be happy if she's not happy here. [Yusuf]

He was hoping that his wife, a pharmacist by training, could find a position at the university so she could continue to have a career while they were in the U.S. There were few people in the area from their home country, and boredom was a problem for her. "My wife likes to be socialized more," Yusuf remarked.

Small frustrations and inconveniences can be magnified by their impact on students' lives. Dawud, who had returned home to marry, brought his wife to the U.S., only to find that an error by Immigration officers when she entered the country prevented her from getting a driver's license for nearly six months. The ISSO was able to investigate the difficulty for the student.

They found that the person who stamped her passport somewhere on the border made a mistake that affected something in the system that talks to the DMV. I don't have the power—you're an international student that can be sent home in a second and then they expect you to deal with all of this.

[Dawud]

Keeping a partner happy was a priority for students, particularly when the student's spouse was prevented from working. Three students interviewed initially came to the U.S. on F-2 visas as spouses. They were eventually able to enroll as doctoral students themselves. Abbas described his wife's efforts to secure a position in a department, not because she wanted a doctoral degree but because it was the only legal way to supplement Abbas' assistantship salary, which was only \$800 per month.

She's sometimes a bit depressed because of money. The stipend of this department is very low, in comparison to engineers and other departments, so we have about half of the money that our friends, even single ones, have.

Because she was on an F-2 visa, she could not get a job. Graduate school was her best opportunity to contribute to their support. Abbas said that the couple has depleted their savings and had to borrow money from their families to survive. As Iranians, money transfers were difficult both because economic sanctions impeded

currency transfers, and also because the low relative exchange value of their home currency meant that even small amounts of cash represented a substantial financial sacrifice for their relatives.

Despite their hardship, Abbas reported that his wife was essential to his own well-being. Not only was her background – a BA in English language and literature – helpful to him in his writing, “Spiritually, physically, just having someone to talk to, going home, and you know that its home. I’m trying to make her happy, but sometimes it’s hard.” Abbas remained hopeful that she would eventually find a place for herself, because she liked being in the U.S.

Being here, and being free from hijab and all other restraints she had in Iran, she is happy with that. I think she knows that it depends on her. If she studies well, and she works hard, she can get through college. She has good connections, but it all depends on her. She went to a law office, and she is getting familiar with the profession. She even went to court, and she liked it a lot. Her personality is very good to be either a lawyer or a kind of psychologist, something like that.

A life partner has a powerful impact on a student’s well-being. Gabriela spoke of her boyfriend, who was also from her country. They broke up after he graduated and returned home.

We went to school together here. It was great because we understood each other. It was great because it was a good support, somebody to get home and talk to about what happened in the day and somebody to share things other than work. So you can relax your mind a little bit. But he left and I’m here

for I don't know how long, but we decided to break up for a moment. It's definitely helpful to have a partner here who is also in grad school or who went through that process. [Gabriela]

Two students had left spouses in their own country. Lowella and her husband moved their wedding forward. "Actually our wedding plan, our agreement was if I did not get accepted, we would get married in December. Because I got accepted, and I got a good assistantship and a fellowship, so we got married earlier." Lowella regretted leaving her husband. She was in the process of applying for a visa for him. She also hoped he would be able to find an assistantship and attend school.

My husband is due to apply for the F-2 visa this September, he has the papers already. On the F-2 visa, he would only be here for a year, then he will go back [home] for his job. It will be like a vacation, and he can't do anything here anyway. He's actually very supportive of me being here. He's very supportive, he's very proud of me, it's just that I am having personal trouble about what he's going to do here.

Lowella missed him terribly, and she was not certain when she would be able to see him. His job required him to remain in his country through the academic year, and she was wrestling with loneliness. "I didn't think it was going to be that difficult. I think maybe that's part of what my problem is, the mismanagement of expectations. I thought I can take it."

Selena followed her husband to the U.S. After a year, she was able to enter a doctoral program with her own assistantship.

I really planned to take the Ph.D., but not as soon as I graduated. I just graduated with my master's at that time, and I was working for three years full time. I was like, I want to wait until I'm maybe middle management. It just happened to be faster than I thought. You know, it was a decision whether I can stay [home] three more years. And my mom was like, "Are you crazy? You're newlyweds. If you're not going to spend the first few years together you might as well not be married." [Selena]

Similarly, commitment to her marriage brought Isabella to higher education, with her own assistantship. She spoke no English when she arrived, but within two years she had learned enough to be admitted to a department. "I am coming to be successful in my marriage. Actually we married because we came here. One of my goals in my life is to be happy with my marriage, so to do that, change things in your life." [Isabella]

Table 3

Spouses' student status

Student	
Spouse at home	2
Spouse left career, looking for position	5
Met spouse while both were students	2
Relocated for spouse, became student	4
Spouse left career, became student	3
Spouse never had career outside home	1

Table 3 indicates the statuses of students' spouses. Of the seventeen students who were married, only two had married their partners while they were students in the U.S. For those students, neither spouse sacrificed a personal career, nor was their visa status affected influenced by marriage. The other fifteen either made a decision to study abroad, or were affected by their partner's decision to study abroad.

Although Deepak's wife had always been a homemaker, he remarked that she was frequently bored at home; they had a much smaller residence in the U.S., and they were trying not to deplete their savings so they spent their resources very carefully. Most of their friends and family were at home, although their children were in the U.S. Deepak made particular efforts to keep his weekends free so they could spend time together. Four students, and eight spouses gave up careers in their home country so a life partner could work on a Ph.D.

Another student spoke with appreciation of her husband's personal sacrifices. He had decided to complete his degree while the family was in the U.S.

It turns out [university] is a little too expensive for us to afford, so he started taking classes at [community college], that were supposed to be the ones that crossed over. He had an associate's degree from ____ state university, so technically I think he'd have a little more than a semester. Let's say a year and he would have been finished, but after two years here we couldn't handle it any more. We used all our resources from home trying to keep him going and keep our family going. That was really lucky that we had to switch to visas because when we switched, his status was that he could go to school if he wanted to, he was not forced to have to be full time and he could work off campus. So it was a

good thing when we switched even though he's only had one stint of work for two months. Because my husband's biggest issue is his age, his not having any experience here in the U.S. So every time he applied for a job he wouldn't even hear back. And at one point in time—I don't know where we heard this, it was as if though our understanding was maybe they were scared because he is of this age and no experience, maybe he was in jail or something like that. And I could see where that would be, but its like, "No, he has experience, he was working up until this point, he was here as a student." I know my husband deserves way more than minimum wage. [Sophia]

Money

As noted above, one student was attempting to survive with his wife on \$800. Student salaries are highly variable across the university's system. The highest paid students appear to be earning about \$2200 per month; these students are in STEM fields, although even for STEM students, \$1600 - \$1800 monthly is a more common stipend range. Doctoral student funding is a departmental decision at the institution in the study. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines for the 48 contiguous states in 2014 are as follows:

Table 4

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline (annual)	Monthly
1	\$11,670	\$972.50
2	\$15,730	\$1310.83
3	\$19,790	\$1649.17
4	\$23,850	\$1987.50

(U.S.HHS,2014)

The Chinese student population is unique among the doctoral students, because only two reported leaving a job to complete their doctoral degrees. For the rest of the students, they left careers to complete their education, so many found themselves constrained by their new economic circumstances.

Being broke again

A student commented on her incentive to enter graduate school. Because her F-2 visa prevented accessing the workforce, and because their savings was rapidly decreasing, she knew that she would not be able to remain with her husband unless she began a funded assistantship.

Besides my career, I had savings, but at the same time I knew it wasn't going to last very long. When you convert it [to dollars] it's not much. This is my three years of hard work at this level, at this salary and it will only tide me over for a year. So I was like, "Ok I have to get to school with an assistantship within the next year otherwise I won't survive. Or I might have to go back and restart my career." So in terms of that there was a big change, I had to change my lifestyle. I couldn't buy as many clothes as I wanted. I couldn't go the spa every month; you know, get my nails painted; get a massage every month like I was used to. I didn't like the fact that there were no—the public transport wasn't as successful, so I had to wait for buses and stuff like that, which took so much time out of my day. [Selena]

Her sacrifice was a significant one, compared to that of her husband. Selena had been the primary income earner for their family. Moving to the U.S. was a significant economic step down. Selena commented,

Cost of living, let's start with that. My husband says he makes more now as a student than he did before as a part time instructor at an undergraduate. He was doing part time and he was consulting in a rehab, which didn't pay much, and he was teaching part time at a university. And education settings pay less than corporate, so I was in corporate and I earned more than he did. I've always earned more. And I was happy with my career and salary and the career progression I was supposed to take. That's why when I got here I was a bit concerned about the pay. He says he's getting more now compared to what he was getting before. But then also expenses are a bit bigger here.

Money is important, not only for purchasing basic needs. In the neighborhood surrounding the institution, money purchases safety and the peace of mind that accompanies it.

I think the money aspect is a huge deal. [At home] I lived in a safe neighborhood with nice neighbors and it was accessible. It's a city so I had access to public transport, it was near my school. I had to travel to work a bit farther but at least I had the money to take a cab back and forth. *I earned enough money to take a cab back and forth.* So it was very convenient in that sense. Here, we can't afford a nicer apartment in a nicer neighborhood with nicer neighbors. We suffer a lot because the neighbors we have always fight, and I think they're drug addicts and drug pushers. It's awful, it really is. They don't have any sense of civility whatsoever. I don't know if it's an income thing, because they don't get paid a lot so they can't afford that kind of neighborhood. So I really wished—that's one thing that could impede my

happiness and motivation to finish my program because I can't concentrate. I'd rather work from home, but I can't. I have to pray every day that they leave to sell drugs or something. I'm not sure what they do. Because they always make noise and we can't do anything. My husband and I just look at each other like, do we tell the police or something? We don't know our rights and we don't want the hassle either if we have to testify.

Sophia commented on the change in their economic status, particularly how it impacted her teenaged children.

It was a step down. You're not around family, but we lost in mobility also. Back in my country, even though it's 11-12 dollars a gallon for fuel, my husband and I both had our own transportation. I was used to being the one giving everybody a ride around. We depend on the city buses now. One of the things that I think is a misconception, is that people who come from other countries to the U.S. are having a step up in social status or whatever. I don't think for a lot of international students that's the truth. In our case it wasn't. It's a step down, and a step down to humbling forms. For example my family and I live now on the same assistantship that the single students here are living on, so you have to prioritize what you can do. In my family there's no compromise for how we eat, that's first. How we dress, where we entertain or whatever, that's not a high priority except for warm clothes for the seasons.

Health care

Sophia's lack of control over important parts of her life was frustrating to her. Health care was an important concern because of the children. "If my son gets sick I

panic because he doesn't have health insurance. He doesn't qualify for any of the ones around here that would be affordable, because he's not a U.S. citizen."

Insurance for her husband and son was prohibitively expensive. "You're living on the edge because legally, with my status, for my visa, he should have it. But we can't afford it so it's not happening. You pray he doesn't get sick or need help." She described a health emergency that was terrifying. She had to call a fellow student for assistance.

So the times we've gone back [home] everyone has been to doctors. We were in a status where if we got a cold I could have a professional look at us. Now I am Dr. Mom, and then my daughter gets this massive headache in the middle of the night and starts to talk nonsense. How do I get to the hospital with her, without having to call 911? It's 1 in the morning. I wake up a classmate, apologizing. If the hospital was five blocks away I'd walk this child in my hands, but the hospitals are far away—and she has insurance. Because she was born in the U.S., she qualified for us to get the other kinds of insurance that my son and husband cannot. But my husband and I are without transportation. If you call 911, there goes half your paycheck before taxes. I'm able to empathize with other international students where that's an issue because we've learned to make a dollar out of 15 cents, not in terms of making a profit but in terms of spending and stretching. [Sophia]

Sophia was touched by the care and consideration many faculty members have shown for her, which have made her situation more manageable. At one point she needed to change her visa, which required an extended trip home.

I've had to go back [home] twice to deal with stuff like that. And [advisor] has been very supportive in that I've gotten time off where last summer I was back in [home] for six weeks. [I was] allowed to continue working ten hours a week from [home] because what I was doing I could do on the computer and I had access to Internet. That may not seem like a lot to some people but that was phenomenal to me because it meant that I could still pay the rent on my apartment here even though I wasn't in the apartment. And I could still deal with the bills. And yes it's half, but half a loaf is way better than none. So I had support in that way. I also had support the first time I had to go back. They facilitated it, so that I could do it because I didn't have a choice. I had to switch my visa status from F to J, so that in itself has been phenomenal with them. And the last year when I did go home for six weeks, it was coming off losing my grandmother who I was closer with than my mom. So these guys, even though it's the good ol' boys, they were really supportive. [She is referring to the all-male faculty in her department.] They were really supportive with what I was going through. I think they were sensitive to what was going on with me and I really appreciated that.

Insecure or limited funding

Not all graduate funding is secure. Although for many students, four to five years is considered a normal length of time to complete a doctoral degree, funding for the duration of their studies is not a certainty. Even though students have observed their advisors going to great lengths to secure their assistantships, they felt stressed by the uncertainty of their positions.

An African student remarked, “I have an additional fellowship, like \$4,000 per year, so I don’t know when this ends what I’ll actually do. I’m asking for other fellowships to apply for.” [Yusuf] A hardship for this student occurred when he attended conferences. Because students typically pay from their own funds to attend, they must then wait to be reimbursed. “You know my bank account is missing \$1,000.” Unexpected costs and expenditures affect international doctoral students in the same ways as U.S. citizens who live in financial uncertainty are affected..

Life is good but the problem is insurance, so it makes us nervous and anxious.

The amount of money is really good if our life goes smooth. But if something happened to me or my wife outside the normal or regular thing, it would be for us a disaster. My life insurance is not strong. We have renter’s insurance.

Of course my family [at home] they subsidize me, but it’s not good. [Yusuf]

The student commented on how much more secure they would feel if his wife, a pharmacist, was able to have some type of job. A Middle Eastern student was appreciative of his advisor’s work in securing needed funding.

For example, for this coming year I didn’t have a source for supporting me because that research project is finished, and the department policy does not allow to have more than two years TA assistantship. But he [advisor] helped to find money for me. These are problems in student engineering. And this is the usual problem for the students to get funding during their studies. [Hamid]

Another student was fortunate that his younger brother, an undergraduate, had been able to work.

My younger brother, who is a U.S. citizen, lived with me for several years and it was bad. We had a one bedroom apartment, and we'd end the month with no money, waiting for that paycheck to come in. He had to get a job and I wish that he didn't so he could focus on his studies. It changes you. You're not allowed to work even if you have the skill set to be useful. Even the university limits you at 20 hours a week, so you have that assistantship and you're not allowed to do anything else. It's frustrating because you know you could improve the quality of your life, and help others as you're doing it. And I'm not saying working full time, but being able to legally go and be a part of the community, they limit you. It makes it difficult. [Dawud]

Dawud spoke of departmental policy, and how that affected his status for funding as well. He was able to land on his feet with a full-time job instead of a student stipend. However, there were stressful months in the process, and he was at the mercy of fortune.

The policy of the department was, that you get five years of assistantship, but for the first two years I actually had a group of people that gave me an assistantship. But because they were so new to the assistantship world, what they did is they paid my stipend and funding for the two years I was with them and that was great, but the paperwork came from my department. So at the end of my third year of my Ph.D., they took away my assistantship. I'd only been here for three years, I'd only taught one summer course, all my Ph.D. colleagues still have two years, what's happening? They considered the two years an assistantship that they gave me. I wasn't part of their office, my

funds were expended, there was nothing but they considered that. That was one of those moments where I was like, I'm done. I think I'm just going to leave. Find somewhere else to finish my graduate school. I was just fortunate enough that a job was available and supported moving a student from an F-1 to an H-1B once they had the necessary experience. I applied, and got hired. I was just lucky that happened in May, and by June I had a job. In this country that's difficult, getting a job, but it worked out for me. [Dawud]

Another student spoke of the limitations of her funding. "I'm under a Fulbright scholarship, and I was accepted in three universities: Ohio, Iowa, and [institution]. But apparently for the other two universities I needed to pay additional costs."

For [here] they cover all. So that's why I chose to come to here. A Fulbright only covers it for three years. After that I need to find other sources for funding or it might be that I apply for TA here, but during the first three years I will be fully covered. [Aninda]

She observed that when she was in Australia for her Master's program, this was not an issue. "They also give opportunity for international students to work. You automatically get a work visa." [Aninda]

A South American student said of her stipend, "There's barely enough to pay my bills. It's not enough to save and visit my family. I haven't seen my family in three years. I cannot imagine people having families and going to grad school." [Gabriela]

Lian, a Chinese student commented, “Its pretty tight. Compared to the salary I got from the previous job. Actually I lived in Beijing that time. And here, right now I have to rent an apartment and to save money I have to calculate everything.”

[Lian]

Conclusion

Students who were married and who had families were more constrained and affected by their incomes than were the single students. Single STEM students tended to believe they were living comfortably. Many had taken the opportunity to travel in the U.S. Three students received salaries from their own countries, rather than relying upon U.S. funding. These students had considerable economic freedom, and had no complaints about their financial status.

Among students’ spouses, two, as noted above, remained in their native country, and one had never worked outside the home. One received an assistantship shortly after his spouse, and arrived three months later. Another successfully found an assistantship after a year.

Common among married students, a spouse frequently sacrificed his or her career for the sake of the student in the U.S. Accustomed to middle class lifestyles and solid incomes, families often subsisted at incomes that were well below the federal poverty guidelines. The students also subsisted at a far lower standard of living that their middle-class jobs provided in their native countries. It must be noted that as of March, 2015, a person who earns the U.S federal minimum wage in the U.S. earns \$7.25 per hour or \$14,500 per year. At the same time, international doctoral students are studying, researching, teaching, and developing patents for an

RU/VH institution, and they are performing these duties at substantially lower wages than would be earned by a person who worked full time in an entry-level position at an average fast-food chain or big box store.

Although faculty members have little control over doctoral funding, higher education administrators do have responsibility for how, and how, much, students are paid. In addition, not all advisors are familiar with the laws that are associated with immigration. Although Yohannes' advisor was able to initiate a refugee application on his behalf, Selena's advisor did not know that she was required to maintain full-time status as a student.

In addition to tuition, generally covered by a graduate stipend, the research institution does not generally cover student fees, which like conference fees, can easily exceed \$500 per semester. Unlike conference fees, they are not reimbursable. For some students, more than half of a monthly salary each semester may go to cover fees associated with being students. Unlike conference fees, they are not reimbursable.

Stress associated with poverty carries long-term physical and psychological health risks which are outside of the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, given the fiscal impact of higher education funding on the quality of life of international student students and their families, one wonders whether there is real institutional commitment to internationalization.

This population is not eligible to receive federally insured students loans, and has considerable difficulty accessing home country finances. The most powerless of students in higher education, international students have little access to resources, few

advocates for their well-being, and many are not even aware of community resources –such as free or low cost health care clinics, free language classes, and food banks – that are available to them. One also wonders about the ethics of bringing students to another country without sufficient funds for them to survive in the immediate future, much less in longer terms – when funding may expire half way through a doctoral program.

Chapter 8

Being international and personal growth

The international doctoral students interviewed regarded themselves as accomplished survivors. They had each found some sort of community for themselves. They all reported struggles and difficulties, but most reported feeling great pride in their work and in their personal lives.

Navigating their environment

Students reported varying levels of success in discovering the community and university resources. Students who had access to active online student networks had an advantage over those who did not. For example, Chinese and Iranian students seemed to be particularly advantaged in having quality informational networks. Finding housing and settling in was not reported to be a difficulty by students from these groups. It seemed as if there was always a floor to sleep on at the very least. Others did not have the same resources. Housing was an outside issue about which many students had strong opinions.

One student described her lack of awareness of university housing for families. She and her husband had been at the university for two years before she heard of the option.

One of the faculty told us, “Are you guys married and you’re both students? Oh that’s great because you are eligible to apply for family housing.” I’m like, nobody told us we could and here I was scrambling. Before we had our own place. We lived with my husband’s roommate and his friends in a big house, and it was horrible. It was fine if they were maybe our age, but they

were not and they liked to party, so it was different lifestyle, different values, and I had a hard time looking for an apartment.

She also noted, “Not a lot of advisors know how to advise or mentor international students. One of the things that I was hoping to have more support on from the ISSO is counseling. And like social integration.” She observed that social integration seemed to be dependent upon advisor’s willingness, friendliness of fellow students, or departmental culture. Programming that existed seemed to be structured for undergraduates, and few resources seemed to be focused on graduate students.

For a student who was moving a family of four to the U.S., her biggest problem was finding suitable housing for her family. She found little institutional support. A citizen of a very small country, she had no consular support group to rely on, and the university offered no assistance or information that she found to be useful or appropriate. “The graduate studies here was awesome at getting me the stuff I needed to get visas and stuff like that. The undergraduate side, which is what my husband was applying for, was the worst and that was hell.” She believed that her husband’s wait was excessive, and the processing of his paperwork was unnecessarily long. “Every week we would be left hung up on the phone. I paid international rates, and they put me on hold for 25 minutes.”

It was a nightmare. And then this is in March. We’re coming in August and I know I’m bringing two kids. One was already in high school and the other one was in what would be middle school here. I can’t live in a hotel for weeks at a time. In March I start trying to apply for housing at the university because in [state] I lived in, university housing was for families and it worked

out well. You know what they told me? Go stay in a hotel and try to find housing because they have a waiting list. I was like, “Dude, international student coming from wherever searching for an apartment?” They gave me access to the [student newspaper] -which isn’t daily in the summer -to try to find housing because they have a list. And you join the list at the bottom. International students or out of state students do not have priority for family housing with [institution].

Another student noted that most of the students he knew felt they missed opportunities through poor information availability. “There is no specific procedure or person that can tell you, there’s no one person that can help you.”

One of the students here wanted to change his Ph.D. to a master’s degree, and he couldn’t find the right answer. He went to [institution]—we were together, and they referred us to [another city]. I mean, you don’t know exactly that if you get this answer from this person it’s the final one. So for that specific case we got different responses and sometimes opposite responses. [Hamid]

A Central American student had a very positive outlook on her graduate life, but she acknowledged that her position could have been easier as well. “I would say that I was very lucky to have a lot of support around me and I really just have words of appreciation.” Although she felt that people were kind, and she did not feel she had experienced any form of discrimination, the daily experiences of being international meant that students may be in need of additional support. “Well for international students it’s very important, like a little support, like about the paperwork and living here.”

A South American student had a more challenging experience. She longed for an instruction manual that addressed how to be an international student. “If it wasn’t for students that talked, I would have missed a lot of the processes along the way and I was late in some of them.” Because the university is a very large institution compared to the student’s prior experiences, many of its policies and processes confounded her. “I went to is a small college compared to [institution]. And there when I stepped in—here’s the set of courses you need to take.” Simply the process and the culture of being a doctoral student can be baffling.

I don’t find a road map like that. Not for the things I need to do. There is, of course, your program of study if you’re fortunate enough to have someone point you towards that. Because that’s not intuitive either, that you should look at that. So it’s like the navigation of things you need to do, I wish was more explicit. And that’s where some of my obstacles came in that I was a little bit late. But the biggest obstacle was that—because I came in with a master’s. Within your first year you have to set up your program of study and get that thing signed off. And you must have an outside person. Who? I am new to this community, I am new to everything and I don’t know any other professors than the ones I’ve had and those are all considered in. That was tough. [Sophia]

Becoming who they want to be

A student trying to grow as a teacher was supported and encouraged by her advisor, whom she felt was a good resource in her work as a TA. A dedicated educator, she wanted to find ways to communicate with students.

I am a professional teacher, but I can say, I can read the message from their eyes, they are not satisfied. They are not satisfied with my teaching, that makes me really depressed and I try to encourage myself, but that time I really need somebody and confirm my effort I put there. So my advisor gave me a lot of support that way. Maybe for a lot of students this teaching assistant is a job to feed them, but for me, it is an opportunity. [Lian]

Personal growth

When asked whether they had changed as people, most students acknowledged that this was the case, usually with promptness that indicated past reflection on the question. Many students recognized that they had grown as scholars and as people during their time in the U.S. They felt this growth was positive. Student reported increases in self-confidence, self-efficacy, openness, and open-mindedness. “I take every chance to just be with people and interact,” one Middle Eastern student commented. A South American student said, “I think my experiences here have made me think differently. I look at things differently, which is good because I didn’t spend all that money to still stay the same.” An African student said, “I have learned that the world is much, much bigger than I thought.”

Self-confidence and self-efficacy

When I went back [home], my brother, my parents told me you have some really good self-confidence now. You have changed a lot in this area, and I think that’s because here in America, especially since I’m in an engineering program, they don’t see that many women in engineering programs. It’s a really interesting program. For example, when I work in

the mechanical shop and work with machines, guys like to have some women spirit in the shop you know? [Elaheh]

When I go back to China, I think everything is different. Thinking better is what I have learned here. Academic thinking, how to do the research, the teaching, living, even. So it's a totally different person, for me. So I encourage all my friends, when I come back to China, I always encourage them to do that, because I think that is a big step for one person to know the whole world. [Jun]

Probably I just learned how to be independent when I was here by myself, because you have to handle a lot of things by yourself. Each time when you face some difficulties, you have to figure it out by yourself instead of getting nervous or anxious. I used to not be a very patient person. And I always got anxious right away, like maybe in one second when the whole situation didn't come out like I expected. But the most recent thing is, I lost my phone, last Saturday, when I was in [city], but I didn't really get that panicked. I just had to think, where was I? I just went and got my phone back. I impressed myself a little bit. [Luli]

Before I came here, I cooked nothing. Literally nothing. My mom did not let me. But when I came here, I started to cook. I found out that I am a good cook. I look in the refrigerator, and anything that can be in the soup, I put it in, so it doesn't have the recipe, [Abbas]

I am a foreigner, and an international student. To stay here, independently, and stronger, we have to work harder. So I think

challenge is good. People who say, “Hey, you don’t need to do this, to do that, make yourself at home, be comfortable,” that means I will never involve myself in this society, which was my previous self, not my real self. [Lian]

I still remember when I’m on the airplane, thinking, “I’m going to America! What can I do? I know nobody here, nobody.” In my school, I don’t think they have a student who came here. So I have no friends, I didn’t know anybody, so it’s really a new time for me to get along with other people, to find a friend, to make friends, and to do all the things by yourself. That is so hard, but, now when you look back, you think, nothing is a big deal. [Song]

It can make people be more brave, braver, and be more willing to accept new things, habits or learning things. Actually most people, they don’t do that. You know, you go abroad, you can find good things in other peoples’ culture, you appreciate what you learn, and that’s how you can find things in your own culture. [Liko]

My mom, she checks sometimes if I’m happy, I said, “yes.” I said, “If I’m not happy I will come back [home].” I feel much better being in this educational system because people here are in favor of women. They’re helping them to grow. We don’t have that type of spirit back [home]. I think it’s good for me to start studying in America as a single woman. [Elaheh]

Everything is different. Before I came here, I think, maybe, I was not that independent, because I don’t know how to cook. I don’t know how to drive, I don’t know how to talk to people in everyday English. I had no idea what was

going on. But here, I have been here for one year, and everything will be fine.

It is just like a grow-up process. [Song]

I'm a good advocate of myself. [Nuwa]

More open as a person

A Middle Eastern student reported a difficult initial transition. When asked whether he had changed, he readily commented that he had become "More open as person. I like this country better than mine, not in all cases, but I told you, I didn't have anyone around me to talk to."

Even now, my wife came here, nine months after, so the first two semesters here were very difficult for me. Homesick and other things, but the basic problem is I think I am losing my decorum, social behavior, with others, because I see other people regularly. I was not so talkative. I would talk only rarely, even when it comes to my research plans, my studies, and my major.

But these days, I go out and give people all the secrets of my life! [Abbas]

Race and diversity

Students had also thought a great deal about living in a culturally and racially diverse society, and their exposure to diversity changed them. "It brought in my mind how I see people from different parts of the world, so I think I'm more open minded, more tolerant to the differences of race, religion, and other things." [Aninda]

A Middle Eastern woman similarly remarked on the relative openness of her environment now, compared to her own culture.

I think I'm a different person. You know, the boundaries of [country] are very closed. We didn't see very many international people in our country, so I

don't know if it's right to say - racist is not a good word for that - we are very focused on ourselves because we didn't have any relationships with other people. But when I came here, I found that the other people also are like me. There is no difference between us, especially black people for example. I used to think less of them but now they are exactly the same for me and there is no difference. But the color differences get lost for me. I think that's a big advantage that I got here. I think we are the same. [Mehrana]

An Asian student confessed that she had reflected a great deal on her feelings about race. Her own society presented far less diversity, and exposure to media and stereotypes had influenced her views before she came to the U.S. "This might sound offensive, but before when I came here my mind was very narrow about African Americans. The image that the media portrays about them [at home] is not very good."

So every time I tried walking around, for me I was scared, [because of] these preconceptions about who Americans are and the color of their skin. It changed because after a while if you look around, and one of those persons actually greeted me, "Good morning," or something like that. He was so nice about it. After a while it really changed the way I started to look at people. And somebody told me you shouldn't be scared because you will be accused of being a bigot. And for me I was like, but it's normal [at home] to feel that way because everybody looks the same. So I was guilty of my own xenophobia. [Selena]

On the other hand, race remained a complicated issue. A Central American student commented on her perception of her identity, compared with her classmates' perceptions. "That's also something that I found here the first time I came. Ok, you have to identify your race here, and I was like, 'Well, I don't know. Am I Hispanic then, or what?'" She recalled a classroom experience,

Once in a classroom, we were an American girl, one was American but her parents are from Vietnam, a girl from Philippines and me. And the Vietnamese girl told us, "Do you realize the only white person here is Katie?" And I was like, "Well, I think of myself like white too, but here I'm not white. [Olivia]

Other insights

Students began to reconsider their own cultures- not finding those cultures wanting, but seeing their culture through different eyes. A Chinese student remarked, "My habits changed. My personality, I think, did not change." A Middle Eastern student reflected on the role of women in her own society, "I do believe women have a really important role in society."

I think we women don't do our job very well here in this world. These men need more stronger women. First of all when I look at my country I see very strong women but they don't know they're strong. They don't take opportunities. They're always waiting for men to tell them what they're doing. They're not really many leadership characters in women. But I know many women, they're strong but they're not really doing their best, you know? [Elaheh]

I see that language is politics, I've never seen that before. So it's a kind of—language is due to—enforce our power to other people. And then I started relating things to one another. In that class I had an assignment to tell a story from my observations. So I observed people, when people do something I interpret what they are doing. So I think that kind of thing changed a lot in my mind, so the way I see something is different from the previous one.

[Aninda]

One student had rethought and reaffirmed her career decision, after being exposed to similar issues in the U.S. “We have poverty [at home], it will never go away, but I never really thought about how to connect [it all].”

The training and the education and the poverty, so it was only now through research I can attempt that in the way I see it can fit. So in that sense it's the influence of [this community]. So in a way it kind of influenced me to think about issues like that. [Selenia]

An Asian student believed that her experiences, and the relative informality between teachers and students, would inform how she would teach in the future.

The way I teach students I think has also changed. After I studied abroad apparently I learned from teachers abroad. Then I see that the relationship is not necessarily to be so rigid, they're just like a friend, of course with some differences in terms of classroom interaction. [Aninda]

A Chinese male student commented, “That may help me to see more things from my own culture, and I ask where does this come from, or why do we do it that

way? Something like that. I think that's what I learned most from here." He appeared to enjoy observing his culture from the outside. [Liko]

An African student observed, "My world was very, very narrow when I was back home. When I came here, my gosh! We all look different, even though we are the same people."

So I have become more of human. I don't how to say, I have become more of human. My level of organization back home was very limited and I grew up through time. I think when I came to America, I think, I have to think from the top level of organization, and not down, like my clan, my family. I can communicate with any other human being. I never worked with Chinese; America makes me work with Chinese. I've really changed. [Yohannes]

A Chinese student felt valued, and the way she was treated caused her to think of herself in a different way. She also began to think about how she will guide students in the future. "Actually I asked my boss to write me a recommendation letter, and I read her letter, again and again, she talked about, how I always initiate something, like she doesn't need to worry about me being lazy or a slacker or things like that, because she knows." The student said of her supervisor's letter, "She said she has never met any graduate student with as much initiative as me, and I think my advisor said something similar about that."

I overheard, because someone else told me that my advisor had that comment. Saying that I really, have my own findings and I defend my own findings. I don't change my interests, just I'm being really protective of my own ideas and interests, and they really appreciate that. So I hope in the future when I

mentor someone, I hope I can listen to him or her, and know whether she is really interested, and I know that value of that. And at the same time, really support him or her to develop their own interests and line of research.

Because when you are interested in something, you can be so productive, but when something is forced on you, then it's really hard. [Meili]

A Chinese student who had prior work experience commented on the custom of Chinese students to go straight through higher education without developing job skills first,

I think I got this goal because I worked first. Then come back to the program. That's why I have more expectations than just the students, who went from undergraduate to graduate to doctoral. You know that's a communication barrier when I'm talking about this. Some students understand, but most of them couldn't. They think, "What are you talking about?" And I think, "You don't understand what I am talking about." [Lian]

Advice

Students were asked what advice would have been useful. The students' responses ranged from practical to philosophical. A Middle Eastern student would have told herself, "Study English better. And maybe study harder in my field in order to be more prepared." From a South American student, "You have to be the one pushing yourself when you're in grad school. Otherwise you'll be here forever." A Chinese student said,

Just, I think America is a good place to learn and make friends and to develop their academic research and interests, like dancing or something. Don't stay

at home, and hang with your own country's students. Try to find some new friends as early as possible. Don't close your mind. That will help a lot. You are in a new country, and learn something from here. It is helpful to know new students. It can help you to discuss, and to develop your ideas. New friends also help you from thinking about your family and your friends too much. It's good to think about them, but it's not good to keep thinking about them and give up your current life.

A Middle Eastern student recommended, "Think of people here more positively and don't be judgmental. I think people here have more privacy than back in my country."

A Chinese student added, "Well, based on my own experience, I encourage people to go abroad. It really helps a lot. If you stay in a place for a long time, it kind of limits your thoughts. Just, wide open eyes is always good.

A Chinese female student said, "I would say the first thing is don't be afraid. I can remember a lot of times I was so confused and so worried, and afraid of talking or asking." She believed that most people were willing to help her. "People are really nice. If you ask for it, people will help you. That will make your life way easier."

And, I guess the second thing would be, depend on yourself. Don't try to rely on other people. It sounds contradictory to the first thing, but not actually. Because you need to know what you really want to do. Because especially in grad school, it's not like in elementary school where people tell you what to do. You really have to find your own self, your own stuff that you can keep

going and not rely on other people telling you what to do. So being proactive, is really important. And don't be afraid of sharing your own ideas with other people. Those are really important, and, make friends. [Meili]

Other insights

One Chinese student was quite passionate about the ways she had come to think of and understand her profession. "How can we as teachers, inspire every kid let them to connect?"

Like me, I got inspired after graduating from college. That time, I thought I was done. Actually, I was not. [I was] just starting. And I started going, faster, faster. Maybe the past years I have learned, just cannot compare to the six years I have learned here.

Another Chinese student observed that for international students, many elements of openness in their way of thinking were already present. "For many people if they are willing to go abroad, they are already willing in their heart to seek some diversity."

A Central American student said, "I'm sure because I have lived so different experience so I'm sure that I have grown. I think that when you study a Ph.D., the first thing you realize is that you don't know anything."

When asked how she had changed, one Chinese student responded that she has changed completely. "The first thing is I think I am more assertive. When I first came here, of course I talked, but I just felt I didn't ask for things directly."

Navigating American culture was a big cultural change for her, and learning to ask for what she needed was difficult. "Because in my culture, you just depend on other

people to guess what you want. We were talking about communication styles, they are so different.” As the only Chinese student in her cohort, she originally hoped for special consideration. “I was the only international student in my cohort, so I hoped they would be more sensitive and ask me and help me, but it didn’t happen because everyone just minded their own life.”

She first had to learn to communicate with people, and to just be direct in approaching people. “I learned how to express opinions directly, and how to ask for help when you really need it. And how to be assertive.”

Being more assertive and more appreciative with my own qualities, my own interests, my own ideas, another thing, is I guess intellectually, because I feel in the past four years I have learned so much. I feel like I have found - I can envision my future self, which was not possible for me three, four years ago. I think I really kind of paved the way for my future career, and that really kind of changed me as a person. Because I can find another part of myself that can be really valuable. What I have learned, in my future career, can potentially benefit other people’s lives.

An African student would advise students to focus on many things, not a single idea to be interested in or to research. “When I was in high school, I was very focused on being good a school. I was thinking that would make me successful.” He added, “I would tell him to make time for the other things also. It’s a concerted thing which makes you successful. It’s not only one thing.”

Back home your parents usually say, go and study, go and study, go and study, because they don’t get education. I’m the first generation in the city.

My father and mom were farmers. So I am the first generation to read and write. So they don't know how, but they know that education can change life. So my dad was the very good advocate for education, even in our community he was well known for that. So he wanted me to be a very good student. When I talk to my nephews, I will put the family scale much, much, much higher. It will be difficult for them

Conclusion

The international doctoral students' most significant complaint was the difficulty of coping with university policies and bureaucracy. In some cases, services were lacking, or inefficiently delivered. Many of the students relied their social networks for necessary information. For students with fewer networks, they lacked important information.

On the other hand, the students were all proud of themselves. They recognized that their academic journeys were also life journeys. The students believed that living abroad made them better scholars and better people, and they liked their new selves, whom they were continuing to author. The international doctoral students, despite frustrations and lack of power and resources, recommended international studies to others at every opportunity. They believed that their growth would continue. In turn, they offered appreciation, observations, and advice for the future. Most of them appear to have made the most of their opportunities.

Chapter 9

Observations

This project began as a study of how international doctoral students' work and relationships with their advisors. I had hoped that the results would indicate what "best practices" would be recognized and appreciated from the students' perspectives. Clearly, most students who responded to the questionnaire, and then consented to the interview, seemed to be very well advised, and were mostly happy with the relationship they had with their advisors. Even for students who did not have an emotionally engaged advisor, they could usually point to another individual whom they believed cared about their well-being. Virtually every student knew someone who was having a difficult experience with their advisor, but only one in this study had a potentially career-altering negative relationship.

It became clear to me by the end of the first interview that much more was taking place with the students than simple advising. For students who lived and studied abroad, life was filled with inconveniences and opportunities that shaped their experiences and informed their perspectives. All had academic concerns, but there was room for other concerns as well.

A theme that arose in the second interview was of the difficulties of studying in English, a language complicated by a vocabulary of nearly a million words, and thousands of idioms and expressions. Communication is always complex. Student language capabilities and inadequacies permeated their lives. Swimming in a metaphorical bath of English, their capacity to communicate directed their career goals, and it also impacted their abilities to form relationships both inside and outside

of their departments. Some students were intentionally outgoing, continually seeking new opportunities to engage with their entire world. Others avoided many outside friendships because they were distracting to vulnerable students who were focused on their studies.

Power and powerlessness was an early theme. Power displays itself in many forms. Certainly, international doctoral students have power of their own. Their intellect, creativity, and determination are important to higher education institutions. Their work in research, grants, and instruction permeates American higher education. The many internal and external forces that affect students' peace of mind are impossible to list comprehensively. That poor grades can lead to expulsion is a fact of life for all students; for international students, poor performance for any reason meant a trip home, and a permanently changed life. For international students, the line between academic success and failure may be a very narrow one.

External factors challenge the students' abilities to concentrate on their studies. Students may be refugees from countries such as Congo or Burma; students come from countries in conflict, such as Syria and Ukraine, or from countries with destabilizing political environments such as Colombia and Afghanistan. Worries about families and their future are always present.

Two students lost close family members while they were here, and neither could attend the funeral. One student's sister has postponed her wedding indefinitely. A mistake on a passport or visa can lead to a problem that may take months or years to resolve. A sick child means crippling medical bills, and a student visa means there

will be no extra money. A miserable and bored spouse also affects a student's productivity and happiness.

Clearly, based upon reported income and student interviews, some students are living in poverty, and family resources are being depleted. In addition to being physically damaging in terms of health-related side effects, the stress can only contribute to the many pressures that international students face. Some students have managed to create a comfortable life, particularly when their funding is adequate to meet their basic needs, but it is unconscionable that students should starve. As newcomers to the community, they at least need to be made aware of resources that could supplement their standard of living. Better, paying students a living wage would allow them some dignity: a person who works 30 hours a week at McDonald's earns a higher income than some doctoral students at this institution. Adding to the indignity is the barrier to outside employment that students and their dependents encounter. It would be difficult to imagine a greater barrier to student success than allowing students to struggle in poverty. Unlike U.S. immigration law, it is also a problem that the institution has the ability to resolve.

Despite their difficulties, most of the students I spoke with were happy. They were proud of their growth, their abilities, their experiences, and their survival skills. They were a remarkable group of people, and it was a privilege to meet each of them.

Research Issues

Editing

With one exception, English was not the first language for these students. I edited direct quotes for grammar and meaning. The students' comments and insights

were perfectly clear, but context was important as well. Highly intelligent and well educated people, most students had sufficient command of English. I had no interest in making anyone look foolish, but I also was interested in retaining their voices. Their accents and unique ways of phrasing, in my opinion, added strength, clarity, and value to their observations. This project was an exercise in maintaining my fidelity to the students who so generously gave their time and their trust to this project.

Student response

The international doctoral students were supportive of this research. Some served as gatekeepers, assisting me in making contact with friends and associates. The students crossed cultural barriers; for example, an Iranian student gave contact information for two Chinese students.

In this research, some colleges and nationalities are underrepresented, and others are disproportionately so. For example, only two students from India gave substantive interviews, and no students from South Korea participated. The Education College was strongly represented, possibly because this group of students understood qualitative research. However, not all departments in the Education College were represented. Similarly, the College of Business Administration had few participants.

Some departments were very open: two engineering departments, Chemistry, TLTE, and Psychology all had more than two students who participated in interviews. International student populations that were slightly overrepresented were the Iranian and Colombian students. The Chinese students were represented proportionally:

about one third of the doctoral students in the study were Chinese, and this ratio is very close to the actual ratio of Chinese doctoral students at the institution. Finally, two students were the only students on campus from their home countries, so in those cases, 100% of the national population participated.

Interviews

This was a project I could have completed with about 15 of the students. Not everyone gives a good, reflective interview, particularly with a total stranger. This reflected on me. The quality of my procedures improved, in my opinion, throughout the project: listening to audio recordings and heeding the observations of my transcriber were instrumental in my growth as an interviewer. I was gratified by how open, frank, and trusting most students were.

Similarly, some questions evolved, or raised more questions. Students did not always embrace the contemporary Western concept of “mentor.” This question I retained without alteration, because it was crucial to understanding advisory roles as they are understood in American higher education. Another question, however, “What do you wish people knew” was somewhat cumbersome and awkward for many students to respond to. Therefore, the variation of this question was a far more functional and interesting “What would you tell yourself, knowing what you know today?” Students seemed to appreciate this question, and often had interesting responses.

Global Advisors

The role of advisors’ travel should not be underestimated. Department and advisor webpages also attract international students. Internet searches were significant

means of students finding information about programs and faculty members. Special efforts should be made to keep information and biographies updated, but students who were able to make face-to-face contact with their future advisor were quite enthusiastic. Nearly half the students had either met or spoken with their advisors before they had arrived in the U.S.

Policy Considerations

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions recruit international students at all levels. As noted earlier in this paper, these students are important sources of globalization for U.S. students who do not travel overseas for their studies. At the graduate, and particularly at the doctoral level, students make important contributions to higher education teaching and research. In addition to adding diversity to an institution and the surrounding community, they bring new ideas, new ways of thinking, and they attract other international students. The students can open doors for institutional researchers in their own countries. At least one student in the study facilitated international relationships for her advisor.

That they are underpaid is perhaps the fate of students in every institution in the world. That some live in poverty because of lack of awareness or lack of interest is not only unconscionable, it is bad human resources policy and it is bad manners. Encouraging students to attend an institution implies that they will be treated with some elements of care, respect, and dignity. Poverty does not make anyone's research better, and has repercussions for students' long-term mental, physical, and emotional health.

Institutions have the power to improve the quality of life for students' families. For students whose spouses are professionals, efforts should be made to create opportunities in higher education whenever possible, particularly in cases when the international doctoral student is in a department with a low stipend. On-campus conversation classes would be an option for spouses to improve language skills. Students should be informed about community resources such as ELL classes, food banks, community gardens, and libraries, as well as volunteering opportunities that would facilitate community engagement for their families. Institutional advocate for international students. Finally, higher education institutions need advocacy offices for international students, regardless of academic position. Most institutions recruit students, and once admitted, responsibilities for their special needs is turned over to an office tasked with overseeing their legal status. These offices are essential, but there is also a need for advocacy. An office is needed that can be a one-stop resource for international students who have concerns about advising, who need emergency assistance, and can help them to connect with the larger community.

National Policy

Policies regarding who should or should not be admitted to the U.S. are fraught with political, cultural, and economic concerns. Visas are carefully rationed. Students who apply for visas must promise to eventually leave the U.S. If at any time they cease being full-time students, regardless of the reason, they are required to leave.

A large body of research indicates that immigration is a net positive for national economic growth. Diverse, well-educated students tend to become innovative researchers and entrepreneurs (Bashir, 2007; Card, 1997; Card, 2005; Chelleraj et al. 2008; Clemens, 2011; Finn, 2012; Finn, 2014; Freeman, 2005; Freeman, 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman & Huang, 2014; Freeman, Jin, & Shen, 2004; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2009; Kerr, 2013; Rodriguez-Pose & von Berlepsch, 2014; Stephan, 2010; Stephan, Scellato, & Franzoni, 2014). Instead of being treated as valuable human capital, they are marginalized. Instead of being regarded as future leaders or future global partners, the U.S. immigration system assumes the students will attempt to remain regardless of the law.

Nations have different policies regarding who will stay and who will go. The U.S.' policy is heavily weighted towards family unity, and is based on the idea that vast numbers of people are clamoring to get into the U.S. Indeed, about 20% of migrants in the world eventually come to the U.S. (OECD, 2015).

It does not logically follow, however, that highly trained students, many of whom are funded by U.S. higher education institutions, will choose to remain in the U.S. Finn (2012, 2014) found that stay rates are trending downwards slightly, particularly among Chinese students. Instead of retaining students that the U.S. has invested in, they are being encouraged to leave. Subjecting them to poor working and living conditions, despite benefits they are receiving as students, promotes neither goodwill, nor U.S. economic growth. Jobs already in the U.S. will remain in the U.S.,

but the economic loss is to the innovation and jobs that will be leaving the country.

Working to retain a substantial investment is simply common sense.

Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation was intended to be a study of advising practice. Student perceptions of advising were related to their culture, age, department of study, age of advisor, and how mentoring is understood.

Possible research areas could include:

- Advising practices from the faculty member's perspective
- How American advisors differ from those born in other countries
- Advising expectations or relationships based upon students' national origin
- Age of advisor, career position, and publication efficacy
- Spouses of international students – their traits, survival skills
- Whether advising techniques vary by department
- Unique student populations – Chinese, Iranian, students whose countries are in conflict
- Duration of effects of study abroad experiences on doctoral students
- Longitudinal follow-up of international doctoral students who returned to their home countries, duration of effects
- Exploring alternative funding policies for international doctoral students
- How costs of higher education influence international doctoral students' choice of country and institution
- How higher education institutions can assist students who become stateless or are stranded by conflict

- National economic impacts of allowing student spouses to have guest worker status
- Study of dual international graduate student households
- Comparative study of how other nations immigration laws privilege or prevent doctoral student/family access to the national workforce
- Economic impacts of 5% increase of international doctoral students to economy

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Default Question Block

Q1. Which graduate degree are you pursuing at this time?

- ☐ Masters
- ☐ Doctoral

Q2. Is this the first time you have attended a college or university outside of your home country?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ No

Q3. Do you have a spouse or life partner?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ No

Q4. Is your spouse or life partner in the United States with you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q11. What is your field of study?

Q6. What is your age?

Q7. What country are you from?

Q8. What country is your advisor from?

Q9. In what year do you expect to complete your degree?

Q10. Would you be willing to participate in a confidential study regarding the nature of your relationship with your advisor?
[Your name will not be used, and we will not know your advisor's name]

☐ yes

☐ No

Q12. If you are a doctoral student, and if you are willing to participate in an interview, please include your name, email, and telephone number here.

Advisor

1. Where is your advisor from?
2. What traits are important to you in an advisor?
3. How do you describe the relationship you have with your advisor?
4. How did you select your advisor?
5. How has your advisor made your experiences here easier?
6. How has your advisor helped you to overcome any difficulties?
7. Describe an event or experience with your advisor which has caused you to think about something in a different way.

Individual

8. Tell me about any time during your doctoral studies when you have felt that you are important.
9. What do you see as obstacles that may have delayed your progress on your research?
10. What do you plan to do after you complete your degree?
11. What was your plan when you came to the United States?
12. How have you changed during your time here?
13. What do you see as obstacles that may have delayed your progress on your research?
14. What do you plan to do after you complete your degree?
15. What was your plan when you came to the United States?
16. How have you changed during your time here?

Institutional

17. Describe any experiences at the university which have made you feel happy, or given you a sense of belonging.
18. What types of organizations or environments at your institution have supported your studies and experiences? Describe that support.
19. What university programs are useful to you as an international graduate student? How have these programs been useful to you?

20. Can you describe a difficult, surprising, or interesting event which has influenced you during your time as a student in the United States?
21. What do you wish people knew about your experiences here at UNL?
22. What should I have asked you about?

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is confirmation that the International Student and Scholar Office (ISSO) will forward an e-mail from Ms. Katherine Najjar to our international student and scholar listserve asking students who are interested in participating in her research to contact Ms. Najjar.

If you need additional information, please contact me at kcagley2@unl.edu or at 402-472-5163.

Sincerely,



Karen A. Cagley, Director
International Student and Scholar Office

Hello.

My name is Kathy Najjar. I am a doctoral student in EDAD at UN-L. I am conducting a study on international doctoral students and their experiences with their advisors. If you are 19 years or older, and an international doctoral student, you may participate in this research project. This is a topic which has received little attention, and I think it is very important.

Participation in this online survey through will take less than 5 minutes of your time. I have attached the link below.

https://unleducation.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_a8Bxl9VGZDTt3SJ

If you wish to participate further, there is a place at the end of the survey which will allow you to share your contact information with me.

There are no known risks or discomforts with this research.

The results of this study may help faculty and staff at universities know how to better advise international doctoral students.

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential. No IP addresses will be collected through Qualtrics. The only way I will be able to contact you directly is through your response to Question 12 on the survey, should you choose to respond.

You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time by contacting me, Katherine Najjar, at 402.719.6471, or knajjar60@gmail.com. You may also contact MY advisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady at 402.472.0974, or mgrady1@unl.edu. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Offices at 402.472.6965 or ibr@unl.edu.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Kathy Najjar

IRB# 14240

Follow-up email form:

Hello. You are receiving this email because you have recently completed a Qualtrics survey, which indicates that you are willing to participate in a research project regarding experiences with doctoral advisors.

I would like to make an appointment to interview you, in complete confidence, to discuss your experiences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Kindly inform me of times which would be convenient to meet with you. This is an interview which should take less than 1 hour, and it will take place on campus.

Regards,

Katherine Najjar

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB # 14240

Title:

International students and their advising relationships

Purpose:

This research project attempt to understand the international graduate student-advisor relationship from the point of view of the international doctoral student. The outcome of this study is to inform advising practices among faculty members, and to develop needed programs for internationals graduate students. You are invited to participate in this project because you have indicated that you are an international doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Procedures:

You will be asked to respond to various research questions concerning your experiences as an international doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Researchers will record and transcribe these interviews in order to analyze the responses. The interview should last no longer than one hour and will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. Interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Each participant will be scheduled for a follow-up interview, which will last no longer than 30 minutes.

Benefits:

You will have the opportunity to share your experiences in a confidential setting, and contribute to a better understanding of the international doctoral student experience.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Upon your acceptance of this agreement, you will receive a unique designation identifying any data associated with you. Researchers will audio record interviews and will transcribe those interviews upon completion. After transcription, researchers will preserve all audio recordings on password encrypted memory sticks. These data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for two years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings but these data will be reported as aggregated data. The name of your advisor will not be known to the researchers.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Alternatively, you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska -Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

☐ I agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Katherine Najjar, M.P.A., Principal Investigator Office:
Marilyn Grady, Ph. D., Secondary Investigator Office:

(402)719-6471
(402)472-0974

IRB # 14240

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I Jihan Najjar (name of transcriptionist) agree to hold all information contained on audio recorded tapes/ and in interviews received from Katherine Najjar (Name of PI), primary investigator for International Students, Their Advising Experiences (Name of the project) in confidence with regard to the individual and institutions involved in the research study. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human Research Protections.

Jihan Najjar
Signature of Transcriptionist

3/29/15
Date

Katherine Najjar
Signature of Principle Investigator

3/29/15
Date